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EURIPIDES.

CHAPTER I.

ATHENS IN THE DAYS OF EURIPIDES.

"Behold
Where on the Ægean shore a city stands,
Built nobly, pure the air and light the soil,
Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts
And eloquence, native to famous wits
Or hospitable."—Par. Regained.

THE greater poets of all times and countries, no less than historians and philosophers, admit of being contemplated under a twofold aspect—literary and historical. Under the former, we may mark how they acted upon their age; under the latter, how far they reflected it. Of the form and spirit of their generation, they are the representatives to later ages—throwing light on its history, on the state of its language and cultivation, and in return receiving light from those sources. Euripides was no exception to this general law: he materially affected the time he lived in; he derived from the circumstances in which his lot was cast many of the features that distinguish him from

Æschylus and Sophocles. As a citizen, he differed from them almost as widely as if he had not been born in their days; and still more widely did he stand apart from them in the practice and theory of dramatic composition. Accordingly, a few remarks on Athens in the time of Euripides may not be an inappropriate prelude to an account of his life and writings.

The Athens in which the boyhood of Euripides was spent was little more than an ordinary town, the capital of a district about the size of an average English county. Pisistratus and his sons had begun to adorn the city with some temples, and at least erected a portion of the Dionysiac theatre; but it is doubtful whether this commencement, or anticipation of the structures of Pericles, was not either destroyed or seriously injured by the Persian invader. Before that calamity had aroused the spirit of her citizens, Athens was indeed little more than a cluster of villages surrounded by a common wall. A wooden rampart was the only defence of the citadel. No fortifications connected the city with its harbours, two of which were still open roads. Even the Pisistratids appear not to have ventured on building for themselves stately mansions, or to have called in the art of painters or sculptors to adorn Athens itself. They did not possess the funds that Cimon and Pericles commanded for great public works. They presided over a jealous people by force of arms, and dreaded provoking it by offensive displays either of wealth or power. Not until the democracy was satisfied with its representatives, and proud of its land and its capital, was it possible to

indulge in lavish expenditure, or to win for Athens the titles of "the eye of Greece" and "the violet Queen."

The period that elapsed between the first and second invasion by the Persians was fraught with too much anxiety to admit of beautifying the city: all that could be done was to supply at least one tenable outwork, and that some miles distant from Athens itself. It was the wisdom of Themistocles to discern that the very existence of his country, if it were not to become a Persian satrapy, depended on ships and not on walls. To insure the security and efficiency of the fleet, a fortified harbour was indispensable. The mud-built or wooden cottages, the narrow and crooked streets of the capital, must be abandoned to the Mede; and such treasure as was then available be employed on the port and docks of Peiræus.

The victories that finally expelled the Persian from Hellenic ground were consummated in B.C. 466 by the battles at the Eurymedon, "when Cimon triumphed both by land and sea." Athens, after the retreat of Mardonius, was little better than a ruinous heap. The fire-worshippers had done their worst on her temples; had levelled her streets, torn down her feeble walls, and trampled under foot with their horsemen and archers the gardens and olive-yards that environed her. The first care of the Athenians was to restore the city, after a desolation more complete than even that with which Brennus visited Rome; for the banner of the Gauls never waved over the Capitol, whereas the wrath of Xerxes was poured especially on the Athenian Acropolis. Nor was it enough to rebuild

the walls: it was necessary to protect the city in future from enemies near at hand; from the never-friendly Thebans; from the Dorians of Peloponnesus, whose fears and jealousy had been awakened by the prowess, so unlooked for by them, of their Ionian ally. The long walls had to be constructed—the harbours of Munychium and Phalerus connected with Peiræus, and riveted by strong links to Athens itself. Before such works could be finished, there can have been neither means, motives, nor leisure for embellishing the capital of Attica. Earlier than 472 B.C., in which year the common treasury of the Allies was transferred from Delos to Athens, Polycletus, Phidias, Zeuxis, and their compeers can hardly have been employed on their immortal labours. The new Athens accordingly grew up under his eyes, and that at a period of life when curiosity is most alert, and memory most tenacious. It was his privilege to watch the growth of temple and hall, colonnade and theatre, gymnasium and court of law, which the people, now a sovereign one, demanded, and their leaders willingly supplied. The poet, most susceptible, as his plays often show him to have been, of the arts allied to his own, beheld in all the freshness of their youth the Painted Porch, adorned by Micon, Polygnetus, and Pantænus, with cartoons of Athenian triumphs and heroes—the ivory and gold statue of Pallas Athene, the tutelary goddess—the Virgin's House, the Parthenon—the Portico, a work of Mnesides—the Propylæa, leading up to "the roof and crown" of Athens—the Acropolis—and other sacred and secular monuments for

which the spoils of the Persian or the tribute of the Allies furnished means. Nor were these unrivalled works, some of which he may have seen on the easel of Zeuxis or in the studio of Phidias, the only features of the time likely to nurture his imagination, or give it the bias towards an expanding future so apparent in his writings. For him the narrow and often gloomy region of legends, national or Achæan, faded before the bright and picturesque glories of the hour. In his time the boundaries of the Grecian world were enlarged. Strangers, attracted to the new centre of Hellas * by business or pleasure, now flocked to Athens from Ægean islands, from the coasts and cities of Western Asia and the Euxine, from the Greek colonies of Sicily, Cyrene, and southern Italy, from Massilia on the Celtic border, from Tartessus near the bourne of the habitable world, from the semi-barbarous Cyprus, and from the cradles of civilisation, Egypt and Phœnicia. For now was there room in Athens for all cunning workers in marble or metal, for those who dealt in Tyrian purple or unguents of Smyrna, or brought bars of silver and golden ingots from Iberian mines; room also for armourers and dockyard men in Athenian ports, where—

> "Boiled
> Through wintry months tenacious pitch to smear
> • •

* "Hellas," although a word unknown in the time of Euripides, and indeed of much later date, is used, here and elsewhere, in these pages, as a convenient and comprehensive term for Greece and its numerous offsets from the Euxine Sea to the Gulf of Marseilles.

Their unsound vessels; when the inclement time
Seafaring men restrains, and in that while
His bark one builds anew, another stops
The ribs of his that hath made many a voyage.
One hammers at the prow, one at the poop;
This shapeth oars, that other cables twirls,
The mizzen one repairs and mainsail rent." *

Artists, too, who wrought neither with brush nor chisel, were drawn to Athens by the magnet of public or private demand—poets eager to celebrate her glories, and contend for lyric or dramatic prizes; philosophers no less eager to broach new theories in morals, or to teach new devices in rhetoric and logic. It was a new world in comparison with the severe and simple Marathonian time in which Æschylus was trained; and, like most new worlds, it was worse in some things, better in others—removed further from gods and god-like heroes, approaching nearer to man, his sorrows and joys; less awful and august, more humane and civilised. And the change is visible in the worst no less than in the best plays of Euripides, and one to be borne in mind by all who would judge of them fairly.

Pass over a few years of the poet's life, and we come to a period when this scene of political, artistic, and social activity is at first clouded over, and in the end rent and dislimned. Among other effects of the Peloponnesian war, one was, that a stop was put to public buildings and the costly arts by which they are adorned: while those that, like the Erectheium, were unfinished

* Dante, 'Divine Comedy,' Cant. xxi., Cary's translation. The poet is speaking of Venice, but his verses are applicable to the earlier Queen of the Seas.

the outbreak of that war, were left incomplete. But the drama did not suffer with other branches of art. Sophocles, Euripides, and a numerous band of competitors, yearly strove for the crown, and the decorations of the stage were even costlier than ever. The suspension of public works, however, was a trifle in comparison with the corruption of morals at Athens—an effect of the war, and of the great plague especially, which there is the authority of Thucydides for stating. But our business now is not with the Athenian people so much as with the stage in the time of Euripides, particularly with a view to the character of the audience.

Attica was a land favorable to varieties of labour and cultivation. At the present moment its light and dry soil produces little corn; but want of capital and industry, not the soil, is to blame. Cereals, indeed, were never its principal produce, though small and well-tilled farms, such as are seen in Belgium and Lombardy, abounded. Rather was it a land of olives and figs, of vines and honey. Sheep and goats, particularly the latter, were kept in large flocks on the mountain slopes: even such delicacies as hams of bear and wild boar were not inaccessible to the hunter on Mount Parnes. The seas swarmed with fish, and inexhaustible were the marble quarries of Mount Pentelicus, while the silver mines of Laurium supplied the public treasury with the purest coinage in Greece. These various products of the soil furnished its occupiers with as varied occupations; and again we have the testimony of Thucydides, that Athenians in general were fond of country pursuits, and before the

Peloponnesian war preferred their fields, villages, and small towns to the attractions of the city. The statement of the historian is confirmed by the great comic poet of the time. Aristophanes, with a wholesome hatred of unjust and unnecessary wars, frequently sets before the spectators how much the worse they were for dwelling within walls, and for leaving their olive-yards and vineyards, their meadows and cornland, where informers ceased from troubling, and booted and bearded soldiers were at rest.

The enforced removal of the country population into the capital can hardly have failed to produce a change, and that not a salutary one, in the character of the Athenians, even if the pestilence had not sapped the foundations of morals by loosening domestic ties, by rendering the sick and even the strong reckless of the morrow, and thousands at once irreligious and superstitious. Such levity and despair as were exhibited by the Parisians under the Reign of Terror, prevailed in Athens during the worst days of the plague. Even the general breaking up of homes, and the want of customary occupations, had evil results for the peasant turned townsman. For some hundreds of farmers and labourers the small towns and hill-forts of the country may have afforded shelter during the almost yearly inroads of the Peloponnesian host; yet the bulk of the rural population was compelled to move, with such goods and chattels as were portable, into the narrow space of the city—the Long Walls or the harbours; where, if they did not suffer from want of food, they were indifferently lodged. War is ever "work of waste

and ruin." If the land were tilled at all, the green corn was taken by the enemy for horse-fodder; fruit-trees were cut down for fuel or fencing of camps; villages and homesteads, when no longer wanted by the Dorian invader, were wantonly destroyed. In place of the rich tillage, woodland, or pasturage which greeted the eyes of spectators from the walls or the citadel, there presented itself a wide and various scene of desolation. All that an Athenian, during many weeks in the year, could call his own, was the sea. He yearned for his bee-hives, his garden, his oil-vats and wine-press, his fig-trees, his sheep and kine. A sorry exchange was it for him, his wife and children! Even his recreations were lost to him. He missed the chat of the market-place and the rural holiday. The city fountains did not compensate to him for the clear stream he had left behind; and his imprisonment was the more irksome because the hated Dorian was trampling on the graves of his kindred. Small comfort to him was such employment as the city supplied or demanded of him. Hard-handed ploughmen or vine-dressers were made to stand sentinels on the walls, or clapped on board a ship of war; or they sweltered in the law courts as jurymen, or listened ignorantly or apathetically to brawling orators in the assembly. He who, until that annual flight of locusts came to plague the land, had been a busy man, was now often an idle one; and weary is a life of enforced leisure. Possibly also he and the town-bred Athenians may not always have been on the best terms. Great mockers, unless they are much belied, were those town-folks. His clouted shoon and

ill-fitting tunic may have cost the peasant, or even the country gentleman, uncomfortable hours, and perhaps led him to break the heads of city wits, or to get his own head broken by them. Town amusements were never much to his liking. The music, vocal and instrumental, which he would hear at the Odeum — the Athenian opera-house—might be all very fine; but, for his part, give him the pipe and tabor, the ballads and minstrels, of his deserted village. Then as to the play-house: the performances there were not to his taste. A farce at a wake, acted on boards and tressels, a well-known hymn sung to the rural deities, pleased him far more than comedies of which he did not catch the drift, or tragedies that scared him by their furies and ghosts, and perhaps gave him bad dreams. The sudden infusion of a new element into the mass of a people cannot fail to affect it materially, whether for good or ill; and such a wholesale migration as this reacted on the townsmen themselves. Some civic virtues they might easily exchange for some rural vices. Cooped as the Athenians, urban and rustic, were within the walls, ill-housed, and often idle, with few if any sanitary or police regulations, we need not history to inform us that Athens came forth from the pestilence the worse in some respects for its visitation.

And besides these changes from without, others of a less palpable but more subtle kind were, in the age of Euripides, affecting the national character, and with it also the spirit, and in a measure the form, of the national drama. "It was a period of great intellectual activity; and the simple course of education under

which the conquerors of Salamis and Marathon had been reared no longer satisfied the wants of the noble, wealthy, and aspiring part of the Athenian youth. Their learning had not gone beyond the rudiments of music, and such a knowledge of their own language as enabled them to enjoy the works of their writers, and to express their own thoughts with ease and propriety; and they bestowed at least as much care on the training of the body as on the cultivation of the mind. But in the next generation the speculations of the Ionian and Eleatic schools began to attract attention at Athens: the presence of several celebrated philosophers, and the example of Pericles, made them familiar to a gradually widening circle; and they furnished occasion for the discussion of a variety of questions intimately connected with subjects of the highest practical moment."* The latter half of Euripides's life was passed, as we may judge even from the sober Xenophon, as well as from the witty Aristophanes, among a generation of remarkable loquacity, in which the young aspired to know a little of every subject, thought themselves fit to hold the state-rudder, and justified in looking down upon their less learned or more modest elders. Every young man, indeed, who aspired to become a statesman, must be an adept in rhetorical arts, since no one could pretend to pilot the ship who could not persuade, or at least cajole, his fellow-citizens. If, on the other hand, he wished to be a public lecturer—that is to say, a philosopher—plain Pythagorean rules for the conduct of life, or Solon's

* Bishop Thirlwall's Hist. of Greece, iv. 268.

elegiac maxims, no longer sufficed. Such old truisms would not bring him a single pupil or hearer. He must be able, and was always ready, to probe the very foundations of truth and law; to argue on any subject; to change his opinions as often as it suited himself;—in short, to be supreme in talk, however shallow he might be in knowledge. To what extent Euripides fell in with the new philosophy will be considered in another chapter.

Let not, however, the English reader suppose that young Athens had it all its own way; that the ancient spirit was quite dead; or that philosophy was merely a game of riddles, and ethics little better than the discovery that there is "neither transgression nor sin." Had it been so, Plato, in the next generation, would have addressed empty benches in his Academy; and at a still later period, Demosthenes have failed to inspire his hearers with either that deliberate valour or that spirit of self-sacrifice which they displayed in their struggles with "the man of Macedon." In spite of some grave defects or some superficial blemishes, the Athens that crowned or refused to crown Euripides was the home of a noble and generous people, easily led astray, but still willing to return to the right path; not impatient of reproof, and sincere, if somewhat sudden, in its repentance. Her citizens were a strange mixture of refinement and coarseness, of intelligence and ignorance. For intellect and taste, no city, ancient or modern, has ever made for its members so varied and sumptuous a provision as she afforded to her children, her friends, and the

stranger within her gates. In the days of Euripides, a resident in Athens might in one week assist at a solemn religious festival; at the performance of plays that for more than two thousand years were unsurpassed; might listen in the Odeum to music worthy of the verse to which it was wedded; might watch in the Great Harbour the war-galleys making ready for the next foray on the Lacedæmonian coast, or the heavy-armed infantry training for their next encounter with Spartan or Theban phalanx. In the intervals of these mimic or serious spectacles, he could study the works of the most consummate artists the earth has ever produced; gaze in the gymnasium on living beauty, grace, and strength; or, if meditatively given, could hear Prodicus and Protagoras in their lecture-rooms, or Socrates in the market-place, discoursing upon "divine philosophy." If he were in any way remarkable for worth or ability, the saloons of Pericles, Nicias, or Glaucon were not closed against him by any idle ceremonies of good introductions, fine clothes, or long pedigrees. Athens, it is well said by Milton, was "native or hospitable to famous wits." And though he had not "three white luces on his coat," nor any coat of arms at all, he was "a gentleman born." His heraldry was the belief that before a Dorian set foot in Peloponnesus, or a tribe of Persian mountaineers had vanquished the Assyrian or the Mede, his forefathers had established themselves in Attica, and taken part in the Trojan war. All other Greek communities, with the single exception of the Arcadians and Achæans—poor bucolical folks then, but destined

a century later to hold a prominent place in Greece were in comparison with the Athenian the creatures of yesterday. One Attic king had been the friend of Hercules, and so was coeval with the Argonauts: and even Theseus had his royal predecessors. And if the Athenian studied the national chronicles, or listened by the winter fireside to the stories of old times, he did not blush for his progenitors. They had ever been redressers of wrongs, harbourers of the exile, hospitable to the stranger; and their virtues supplied Euripides with themes for several of his plays.

The poet, who had watched the growth of his native city, witnessed also the rapid extension of its empire. When Euripides was in his boyhood, Athens was but a secondary power in Hellas;—inferior to Corinth in wealth and commercial enterprise; to Sparta in war and the number of its allies. In his twenty-sixth year—the year in which he exhibited his first play—Athens had become the head of a league far more powerful than the confederacy which the "king of men" led to the siege of Troy. She stepped into the place which the proud, selfish, and custom-bound Spartan had abandoned. An active democracy eclipsed a sullen and ceremonious oligarchy; and although the Dorian in the end prevailed, it was partly owing to Persian gold that he did so, and partly because the Ionian city had squandered her strength, as France so often has done, in unjustifiable and prodigal wars. At all times, and especially while the "breed of noble blood" flowed in her veins—while to be just as Aristides, chivalrous as Cimon, temperate in the execution of high office as

Pericles, continued to be accounted virtues—Athens held, and deserved to hold, her supremacy. Proud, and justly so, were her sons of their beautiful city. The tribute paid to her by the allies for protecting them from the Persian was fairly expended upon the maintenance of the fleet and the encouragement of art. Her citizens were, and felt themselves to be, in the van of Greek cultivation. They hailed with applause the praises addressed to them by the dramatic poets—and the praises were no idle flattery. Was it not a truth that, had it not been for the Athenians, northern Greece would have given earth and water to the Persian envoys, and Peloponnesus have selfishly abandoned the sea to the Phœnician galleys? True also, that but for the Athenians, "dusk faces with white silken turbans wreathed" might have been seen in the citadels of Corinth and Thebes? Of a city that had so well deserved of every state, insular or on the mainland, where Greek was spoken, the most appropriate ornaments were the triumphs of the artist. Rightfully proud were the Athenians of their beautiful city; as rightfully employed were the pens of poets in giving these monuments perpetual fame.

With history, direct or indirect, before us, it may be possible to describe, or at least divine, the spectacle presented at the Dionysiac theatre when Sophocles or Euripides brought out a new play.* The audience consisted of nearly as many elements as, centuries later, were to crowd and elbow one another in the vast space of the Roman Colosseum. The lowest and best seats, those nearest the orchestra, were reserved for

men of mark and dignity, for the judges who would award the prizes, for sage, grave members of the Areopagus, for archons in office, or for those who had already held office, for soldiers "famoused in fight," for ambassadors from Greek or foreign lands, for all who had some claim to precedence from their rank or their services to the commonwealth. Women were admitted to the tragedies at least, boys as well as men to all performances; even slaves were permitted to be present. The women, by Greek usage secluded at home, were probably assigned a particular apartment in the playhouse; the boys were perhaps of use, as often as an unpopular competitor for the crown tried his fortune once more; and possibly Euripides may have occasionally regretted the presence of these youthful censors. No registered citizen could plead poverty as a reason for not witnessing these theatrical contests; if he had not money in his purse, the state paid for his ticket of admission. To foreigners were commonly allotted the back seats; but so many mechanical devices were employed for the conveyance of sound, that unless a sitter in the gallery were hard of hearing, he could probably catch every line of the choral chant or the recitative of the dialogue. Nor might short-sighted people be quite forlorn; he was pitiable indeed who could not discern, vast as was the space between himself and the stage, the colossal actors mounted on their high boots, and raised by their tall head-dress above ordinary mortal stature. A purblind stranger might perchance regret that he could not distinguish in the stalls bald-headed Nicias from the long-haired Alci-

biades; and that although Socrates was certainly in the house he could not identify him among a batch of ugly fellows, with whom, he was told, the celebrated street-preacher was sitting.

The gallery in which foreigners sat is perhaps the most interesting feature of the audience to English readers—interesting, because it represented the various members of the Athenian empire, as well as of the Hellenic race. A merchant whose warehouse was near the Pillars of Hercules, would find himself seated beside one who had brought a cargo of wheat from Sinope, on the Euxine Sea. A hybrid—half-Greek, half-Egyptian—of Canopus, would have on his right hand a tent-maker from Tarsus, on his left a Thessalian bullock-drover. The "broad Scotch" of the Greeks—the Dorian *patois*—would be spoken by a group of spectators in front of him; while a softer dialect than even the Attic, pure Ionic, was used by a party of islanders behind him. "What gorgeously-attired personage is that on your left?" "A Tyrian merchant, rich enough to buy up any street in Athens—a prince in his own city, a suitor here. He has come on law business; and although at home he struts like any peacock, here he is obliged to salute any ragged rascal in the streets who may be a juror when his cause is heard. To my certain knowledge, the great emerald column in the temple of Melcarth, at Tyre, is mortgaged to him." "And who is that queerly-dressed man a little beyond the Tyrian? By his garb and short petticoat I should take him for a Scythian policeman,* but he has not the

* Scythian bowmen were the *gendarmes* of Athens.

yellow hair and blue eyes of those gentry." "That, sir, is a Gaul from Massilia; he is on his road to Bithynia, where the satrap Pharnabazus, I think his name is, is offering good pay to western soldiers—and where there is gold there also is sure to be a Gaul. The fellow speaks Greek fairly well, for he was for some time in a Massilian counting-house, his mother being a Greek woman." We should tire our readers' patience long before we exhausted the portraits of sitters in the strangers' gallery in the Dionysiac theatre; and it is only due to the Athenian portion of the audience to turn for a few moments to them.

Samuel Johnson could not conceive there could be "livers out of" London; or that a people ignorant of printing could be other than barbarous. Had he been as well acquainted with Greek as he was with some portions of Latin literature, he might have found cause for altering his opinion. The Athenians were not in general book-learned, but such knowledge as can be obtained by the eye and the ear they possessed abundantly; and the thirty thousand registered citizens, to say nothing of resident aliens, were better informed than an equal number of average Londoners are at the present time. In the rows of the theatre, as on the benches of the Pnyx,* might be seen men who, if judged by their apparel, would have been set down for paupers, if not street-Arabs; and yet these shabby folk were able to correct orators who mis-

* The Pnyx was the place where the people of Athens assembled to hear political debates—in fact, their House of Parliament.

pronounced a word, singers when out of tune, and actors who tripped in their delivery of dialogue. Their moral sense, indeed, was not on a level with their taste and shrewd understandings: yet we shall have to record more than one instance of their calling Euripides to account for opinions which they deemed unwholesome, or for innovations which they regarded as needless departures from established custom. It may be doubted whether they were a very patient audience. They seem to have had little scruple in expressing their approbation or disapprobation, as well of the poet as the actor; and their mode of doing so was sometimes very rough, inasmuch as, besides hissing and hooting at them strenuously, they pelted bad or unpopular actors with stones.

The varied appearance of the spectators on the higher benches did not extend to the lower ones, which the citizens proper occupied. Fops and dandies there were in the wealthy classes, and especially among the immediate followers of Alcibiades, or those who aped their extravagances. But generally no democrat brooked in a brother democrat display or singularity. A house better than ordinary, or fine raiment, were considered marks of an oligarchic disposition; and the owner of such gauds, if he aspired to public office, was pretty sure to have them cast in his teeth at the hustings. But sobriety in raiment, in dwelling, or equipage, did not abate the vivacious spirit of the Ionians of the west. When offended or wearied by a play, they employed all the artillery of displeasure against the spectators as well as the per-

formers. Sometimes an unpopular citizen attracted notice; and then the wit at his expense flowed fast and furious, as it occasionally does now from a Dublin gallery. Were there a hole in his coat, it was likely to be mentioned with "additional particulars:" if he had ever gone through the bankruptcy court, it was not forgotten: swindling or perjury were joyfully commemorated: still more so any current rumours about poisoning a wife, a rich uncle, troublesome step-sons, wards, mothers-in-law, and other family inconveniences.

Such were the audiences who sat in judgment on the great drama of the ancient world. It may be probably conjectured that Euripides found more favour with the resident aliens and the visitors from foreign parts than with the born citizens. To these, his somewhat arbitrary treatment of old legends—his familiar dealing with, or perhaps humanising of, the Hellenic deities, his softening of the terrors of destiny, his modification of the songs and functions of the Chorus, and other deviations from the ancient severity of dramatic art—would give little, if any, offence. For such spectators the dooms hanging over Argive or Theban royal houses would have but little interest. Their forefathers had taken no part in the quarrel between Eteocles and Polynices, cared little for the authority of the Areopagus, had local deities and myths of their own, among whom were not reckoned Pallas Athene, Apollo, or the Virgin Huntress. To the foreigner, that triumphal song, the "Persians" of Æschylus, and his "Prometheus," were perhaps

more welcome than his Orestean trilogy. The fables of these plays were common and catholic to the whole Hellenic world. The friend and protector of mankind, the long-suffering Titan, touched chords in the heart of a Greek spectator, whether he drank the water of the Meander or that of the fountain of Arethusa. The flight of Xerxes and the humiliation of the Mede were the story of his own deliverance from the dread or oppression of the great king. Even the tragi-comedy of Euripides might be more agreeable to him than the sombre grandeur of Æschylus, or the serene and perfect art of Sophocles.

But to the purely Athenian portion the innovations of Euripides were less acceptable. If we are to judge by the number of prizes he gained, at no period of his career was he so popular as Sophocles. He was rather a favourite with a party than with the Athenian public. In some respects the restless democracy was very conservative in its taste. The deeds of its forefathers it associated with Achæan legends: the gods of the commonwealth, although it laughed heartily at them when travestied by the comic poets, still were held to be the rightful tenants of Olympus; whereas the Euripidean deities were either ordinary men and women, or "airy nothings," without any "local habitation." Marriage-vows, again, were not very strictly kept by Athenian husbands, yet they did not approve of questionable connections, and thought that Euripides abused poetic licence when he made use of them in his dramas. Moreover, there may have been

something in his habits unpalatable to them : he lived apart ; conversed with few ; cared not for news ; held strange opinions, as will be seen presently, about women and slaves, wits and politicians ; was no "masker or reveller ;" and, in short, took no pains to make himself publicly or privately agreeable. Englishmen are devout worshippers of public opinion, as it is conveyed through the press. Athenians, without a press, were quite as subservient to their leaders in opinion. They liked not eccentricity, or even the show of pride. In a few cases, indeed, they condoned apparent neglect : Pericles, who rarely went among them unless weighty matters were in hand, they pardoned for his good services to democracy ; the grave and tristful visage of Demosthenes, who was rarely seen to smile, they overlooked in consideration of his stirring appeals to their patriotic feelings ; but they could not pardon a man who sought fame, if not money, by his plays, for being uncivil to playgoers. And little civility they got from him, beyond a few compliments to their sires or their city.

A very heterogeneous mass were these unofficial judges of dramatic poets. Between twenty and thirty thousand spectators could be assembled in the theatre of Bacchus. Beyond the seats occupied by privileged persons, and below those allotted to strangers, sat the sovereign people. The war party and the peace party were not separated by barriers. Aristophanes might be next to Lamachus, and the tanner Anytus next to barefooted Socrates. Government contractors, enriched by the war, were mixed up with farmers who

were ruined by it. The man who could calculate an eclipse was wedged in with people who thought that the sun or moon when obscured was bewitched; Strepsiades's pleasure might be spoilt by the near neighbourhood of his creditors; and Euelpides, who dropped on his knees on seeing a kite, be close to Diagoras the Melian, who knelt not even to Jupiter.

The social, intellectual, and perhaps also the moral changes, which affected Athenians during the long life of Euripides, may be partly gathered from the Greek orators, as well as from the satirical comedians. Isocrates, referring to "the good old times"—often, as respects superior virtue or wisdom, a counterpart of the "oldest inhabitant"—and comparing his own generation with that of Marathon and Salamis, points out the causes of backsliding. "Then," says the orator, "our young men did not waste their days in the gambling-house, nor with music girls, nor in the assemblies, in which whole days are now consumed. Then did they shun the Agora, or if they passed through its haunts, it was with modest and timorous forbearance; then to contradict an elder was a greater offence than nowadays to offend a parent; then not even a servant would have been seen to eat or drink within a tavern." It was this golden or this dreamland age for which Aristophanes sighs in his comedy of "The Clouds," deploring the degeneracy of the young men in his time, when sophists were in the room of statesmen, and the gymnasium was empty and the law courts were filled. Into the mouth of old Athens, addressing the young one, are put the following verses :—

"Oh listen to me, and so shall you be stout-hearted and
fresh as a daisy;
Not ready to chatter on every matter, nor bent over books
till you're hazy:
No splitter of straws, no dab at the laws, making black seem
white so cunning;
But wandering down outside the town, and over the green
meadow running,
Ride, wrestle, and play with your fellows so gay, like so
many birds of a feather,
All breathing of youth, good-humour, and truth, in the time
of the jolly spring-weather,
In the jolly spring-time, when the poplar and lime dishevel
their tresses together." *

Such were Athens, its people, and its theatre, when Euripides was boy and man: we now proceed to inquire what manner of person he was himself.

* The extract from the Areopagitic oration of Isocrates is taken from Bulwer's 'Athens—its Rise and Fall,' vol. ii. ch. 5, p. 577; the translation of Aristophanes from a most wise and beautiful little book, entitled 'Euphranor, a Dialogue on Youth' (1851).

CHAPTER II.

LIFE OF EURIPIDES.

"How about Euripides?
He that was born upon the battle-day:
Might you know any of his verses too?"
—BROWNING: "Balaustion's Adventure."

THE received date of the birth of Euripides is the year 480 B.C. He was accordingly forty-five years junior to Æschylus, and fifteen years younger than Sophocles. This difference in their respective ages is not unimportant as regards their very different views of dramatic art. His birthplace was the island of Salamis, where his mother, with other Athenian women, and with men too old, or children too young, for the defence of their native city, was taking refuge, and he came into the world on the day of the great sea-fight that has immortalised its name. Of his father Mnesarchus little is known; but it may be supposed he was a person of good station and property, since he could afford his son a liberal and expensive education, such as at that time was within reach of only wealthy families. His mother Clito, thanks to the poet's enemies, is better known to us. Probably she was not of

the same social grade as her husband; a "metic" perhaps, or half-caste, with pure Athenian blood on one side only. But that Clito was ever a herb-woman, kept a greengrocer's stall, or hawked fruit and flowers about the streets, is doubtless a tale devised by her son's ill-wishers. Demosthenes, the orator's father, was a master cutler, and, as his son's suit against his knavish guardians shows, drove a brisk trade in swords, spear-heads, knives, and shears; but it does not therefore follow that either the orator or his sire hammered on the anvil or blew the bellows themselves.* In democratic Athens there was at all times a prejudice in favour of high birth, and one of the most effective arrows in Demosthenes's quiver against Æschines was, that his rival had once been a player, that his father was a low fellow, and his mother a dancer, a fortune-teller, and an altogether disreputable person. Clito and her husband very possibly owned some garden-ground near Athens, and its produce may have for a time supplied a convenient addition to their income. The Persians can hardly have been twice quartered on Attic soil without affecting seriously the rents or dividends of its owners, and thus the parents of Euripides may have been glad to sell their vegetables.† To represent Clito as

* "Bleared with the glowing mass, the luckless sire
From anvils, sledges, bellows, tongs, and fire,
From tempering swords, his own more safe employ,
To study rhetoric sent his hopeful boy."
—Juvenal, Sat. x., Gifford.

† One account reverses the story: according to it, Clito was "a person of quality," and Mnesarchus not a gentleman but a shopkeeper, or at least "in business."

vending her own wares was an irresistible temptation to comic dramatists, indifferent whom they used for mirth and laughter, whether it were a Pericles or a Cleon.

Like many fathers before him and since, Mnesarchus was puzzled about his son's proper calling in life; and so, as modern parents often consult some sound divine about the choice of a school for their lads, he took counsel of those who understood what the stars or birds of the air forebode as to the destiny of mortals. But either there was a mistake in casting the boy's nativity, or else the birds lied; for both they and the stars advised Mnesarchus to train up his child in the way of boxing and wrestling. So far this muscular education was successful; it enabled the young Euripides to gain a prize or two in the ring, but at local matches only, for though entered for the Olympian games, he was not allowed to put on either the gloves or the belt. There was some informality—he was too young or too old—and he was struck from the lists. It is remarkable, in connection with this period of his life—at the time of his rejection by the Olympic managers he is said to have been about seventeen years of age—that, in his plays, Euripides has never a good word for prophets and soothsayers; while, as for athletes, he denounces them as the most useless and brutal of men. His aversion to them may have arisen from these youthful misadventures. His proper vocation was yet to seek; and until he found it, he seems to have been rather devious in his pursuits, since, among other arts, he studied that of painting, and

practised it with some success, a picture by him being, long after his decease, exhibited at Megara, either as a creditable performance or a curiosity. The painter may have been of service to the poet; his dramas, especially the lyrical portions of them, display much fondness for words expressing colour. Painting was perhaps as useful an ally to the Greek poet, as skill in music was to Milton in the construction of his verse. The real business of Euripides turned out to be the cultivation of his mind, and not of his muscles. His lines were set in the (to him) always pleasant places of poetry and philosophy; his wrestling powers were to be exercised in combats with dramatic rivals, and still more hostile critics. And this was perhaps what the stars really said, only the stupid soothsayers did not read them aright. Such people have more than once brought those who consult them into trouble, as poor king Crœsus, long before Euripides was born, found to his cost. The instructors of Euripides in philosophy were Anaxagoras for physical and Protagoras for moral science. Prodicus gave him lectures in rhetoric, and the studies of his youth were confirmed, expanded, or corrected in his manhood by the good sense of Socrates, who, besides being a guide and philosopher, was also his friend. An education of this kind implies that either Mnesarchus was a man of fortune, or that his son early came into one, inasmuch as the Greek sophistical lecturers were quite as costly as many English private tutors are now. We do not know their actual terms, but we do know that they were beyond the reach of ordinary incomes. "Think," says Hippias to Soc-

tales, "of the sums of money which Protagoras and Prodicus collected from Greece. If you knew how much I had made myself, you would be surprised. From one town, and that a very small one, I carried off more than 150 minæ (£609), which I took home and gave to my father, to the extreme astonishment of himself and his fellow-townsmen." It is also a token of Euripides being well provided with money, that he collected a library—large enough to excite observation at the time, and to be recorded afterwards. Forming a library in any age, heathen or Christian, is an expensive taste; and, on the whole, printed books are cheaper than those transcribed by the hand. Grecian sheepskin or good Egyptian paper (papyrus) was a costly luxury.

In his twenty-sixth year Euripides presented himself for the first time among the candidates for the dramatic crown. In that year (455 B.C.) death removed one formidable rival from his path, since in it Æschylus expired. Of the three tragedies produced by him on this his first trial, one was entitled, "The Daughters of Pelias," * and a few lines of it which have been preserved show that it turned upon some

* Among the few fragments preserved of this play are four lines, apparently indicating that Medea was devising mischief to somebody—perhaps putting on the copper or sharpening a knife for the behoof of Pelias. Whatever it was, she is asking advice, and her monitor gives it like a person of good sense:—

> "A good device; yet to my counsel list:
> Whilst thou art young, think as becomes thy years:
> Maidenly manners maidens best become.
> But when some worthy man has thee espoused,
> Leave plots to him; they suit not with thy sex."

adventures of Medea—a theme that a few years after he was to handle with signal success. The third prize was awarded to him—no mean distinction for a novice. But not until Euripides was just forty years old did he obtain the first prize; and the name of this successful trilogy is not preserved. Prominent as the "Medea" now stands among his works, the trilogy of which it formed a part gained only the third prize. Six years after the production of the "Medea," Aristophanes opened upon its author his double battery of sarcasm and parody, not indeed against the "Medea," but against a companion drama, now lost, the "Philoctetes."* It is difficult to perceive any possible link between the Colchian princess and the possessor of the bow and arrows of Hercules; we may therefore infer that the group to which these two plays belonged was made up of fables unconnected with each other —a departure from earlier practice that did not originate with Euripides, though he is sometimes taxed with it.

He was twice married; his first wife was Chœrilla, a daughter of the Mnesilochus who appears in Aristophanes's comedy of the "Thesmophoriazusæ;" by her he had three sons: his second was Melitto. According to some accounts he was a bigamist; in

* Of this "Philoctetes" there is a very fair account—by no means a common piece of luck with Euripides—by Dion Chrysostom, Oration lii. Dion compares the "Philoctetes" of Æschylus (lost) and that of Sophocles (extant) with the Euripidean drama; and he shows that each of these pieces has its several merits.

Athens, however, bigamy, though uncommon, was not a punishable offence.* There was some scandal about one or other or both of these ladies; probably, if there were any ground for it, it applied to Melitto, since Euripides lived for many years with Chœrilla upon, so far as is known, ordinary connubial terms. Athens, however, it must be recollected, in justice to both ladies, was a very gossiping city; nothing (we have it on the authority of St Paul, seconded by that of Demosthenes) pleased them so much as to tell and to hear news, and any news about Euripides was certain of welcome to those who had laughed at the representation of him in the "Acharnians." If it be fair to draw inferences from the wedded happiness of "the laureate fraternity of poets," it might appear that Euripides would have fared better had he remained a bachelor. Dante complains that Gemma, his wife, held him in subjection; Shakespeare was not quite comfortable, it would seem, at home; Milton's start in married life was unlucky; Wycherley and Addison were fearfully henpecked. If Christian husbands

* Hume, in his 19th Essay, writes:—"I have somewhere read that the republic of Athens, having lost many of its citizens by war and pestilence, allowed every man to marry two wives, in order the sooner to repair the waste which had been made by these calamities. The poet Euripides happened to be coupled to two noisy vixens, who so plagued him with their jealousies and quarrels that he became ever after a professed woman-hater; and is the only theatrical writer, perhaps the only poet, that ever entertained an aversion to the sex." The "good David," though sceptical enough on some subjects, was rather credulous on the score of anecdotes of this sort.

fared so ill, it may have been worse with a heathen poet, at a time and in a country where a man's lawful wife was scarcely more than his cook and housekeeper.

There is no trace of Euripides having, at any period of his life, taken part in public affairs. He seems never to have been archon, or general, as Sophocles was, or priest, or ambassador, or foreman of a jury. Doubtless he paid some rates or taxes in his parish (*deme*), Phylæ of the Cecropid tribe. He was commonly accounted a morose and sulky fellow; and since he shunned general society, he was naturally charged with keeping low company.* He was indeed—far more than was usual in his time, and among a people passing most of their days in public—"a literary man," preferring solitude and his library to the hubbub of the market-place, or the crowding and noise of popular assemblies. According to a story preserved by a Roman anecdotist, Euripides pursued his studies in a grim and gloomy fashion. One Philochorus professed to have seen a "grotto shagged with horrid thorn," † in which he composed his tragedies. He is said never to

* The spirits in Hades, that in "The Frogs" rejoice in the rhetorical tricks ascribed to Euripides, are supposed, while on earth, to have inhabited the bodies of cut-purses, highwaymen, burglars, and parricides—such "minions of the moon" being, in Aristophanes's opinion, the pupils of sophistical tutors; or, at least, their notions of property and filial piety, he thinks, were probable results of their education. There was a time when to be a Hobbist or a Benthamite was thought to tend to similar aberrations from virtue.

† Ben Jonson, certainly not an unsocial man (witness the

have laughed, rarely to have even smiled, and to have worn habitually a sorrowful visage. If it were so, Euripides was such a man as the vivacious Gratiano disliked, and even suspected :—

> "Why should a man whose blood is warm within
> Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
> Sleep when he wakes, and creep into the jaundice
> By being peevish?"

And Cæsar perhaps might have thought him dangerous, though we have no reason for supposing Euripides "lean and hungry," as Cassius was, but, on the contrary, as will appear, a well-favoured, though a grave and silent man. Perhaps Euripides's horoscope may have resembled that of the good knight of Norwich: "I was born," says Sir Thomas Browne, "in the planetary hour of Saturn, and I think I have a piece of that leaden planet in me. I am no way facetious, nor disposed for the mirth and *galliardise* of company."

The 'Spectator' remarks that "a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure till he knows whether the writer of it be a black or a fair man, of a mild or choleric disposition, married or a bachelor, with other particulars of the like nature that conduce very much to the right understanding of an author." There are

things said at the Mermaid, his butt of sack, his 'Tribe of Ben'), describes himself in these lines :—

> "I, that spend half my nights and all my days
> Here in a *cell* to get a dark pale face,
> To come forth worth the ivy and the bays," &c.

Did we know as little of the English as we do of the Greek poet, here would be ground enough for a legend of a "grotto."

means for "gratifying this curiosity, which is so natural to a reader;" for, thanks to some scholiast or painstaking collector of the curiosities of literature, there exists a brief life of Euripides containing some account of his personal appearance. He is said to have worn a bushy beard, and to have had freckles on his face. This, indeed, is not much; yet it is somewhat for us to learn—a scrap redeemed from the wallet that Time bears on his back. On the same authority we may fairly assume, that when a beardless youth, and perhaps unfreckled, he was noted for fair visage, and that he was "a gentleman born." He was a torch-bearer at the festival of Apollo of Zoster, a village on the coast of Attica.* Now none but handsome and well-born youth were chosen for that office. It is to be hoped that many of our readers are acquainted with Charles Lamb's righteous indignation at the conduct of the "wretched Malone," the Shakespearian editor and commentator, in covering with white paint the portrait-bust of Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, "which, in rude but lively fashion, depicted him to the very colour of the cheek, the eye, the eyebrow, hair, the very dress he used to wear—the only

* The festival was held at Delphi, and probably, therefore, Euripides was conveyed thither in the galley (paralus) which annually carried offerings to Apollo's shrine. The young men, clad in Therain garments, danced round the altar. May not this visit to Delphi have been the germ of the poet's beautiful drama, "Ion"? In any case the report of it shows that no ignobility of birth was attached to the name of Euripides by those who circulated it; and among them was Theophrastus, who indeed wrote long afterwards, but yet weighed his facts.

authentic testimony we have, however imperfect, of these curious parts and parcels of him." If we balance in each case probable facts against equally probable traditions, we may conclude Euripides to be known to us almost as well as Shakespeare, owing to this good Dryasdust, the Greek biographer, who disdains not to chronicle even "freckles."

But it is impossible to believe Euripides to have been a mere recluse. His vocation as a writer for the stage must have brought him into contact with many persons connected with the theatre—with the archon who assigned him a chorus, with the actors, singers, and musicians who performed in his plays, and with the judges who awarded the prizes. Yet if we ask what company he kept, we pause for a reply, and do not get one. We know that he was a friend of Socrates, who never missed attending on the "first night" of a play by Euripides. We know also that every man's house and many men's tables were open to the Silenus-like son of Sophroniscus. We can tell the names of the guests at Plato's and at Xenophon's banquets. Socrates of course is at both, and that of Plato is held at the house of Agathon, Euripides's intimate friend. Some kind of acquaintance, perhaps not exactly friendship, existed between Alcibiades and Euripides, who once celebrated in verse a chariot-victory of that brilliant but dangerous citizen's at the Olympic games. Neither at Plato's nor Xenophon's feast, however, is Euripides present. Nor is it likely that travelling into foreign parts was among the causes for his absence on such festive occasions, since, until in

his later years he quitted Athens, there is no trace of his leaving Attica, except the single fact of an inscription in the island of Icarus ascribed to him. This, however, is no evidence at all of his being from home, since a waxen tablet or a snip of papyrus could have conveyed the inscription, while Euripides remained in his grotto or his library, wrapt in contemplation on his next new play, or striving to solve hard sayings of Prodicus or Protagoras.

Once, indeed, we find him at home. It was in his house that Protagoras is said to have read one of the works by which that philosopher incurred a charge of atheism; and this worshipful society, once bruited abroad, was not likely to be overlooked by the pious writers of comedy. Often, indeed, does Athens, at the period of the Peloponnesian war, present an image of Paris in the last century. There the Church was despised, and yet stanchly supported by men of notoriously evil life; in Athens, divinities, whom the people worshipped superstitiously, if not devoutly, when the theatre was closed, were butts for the people's mirth and laughter when it was open. We have a record of only the two banquets of this time already mentioned. Could we have a report of a "*petit souper d'Alcibiades*," it might very likely remind us of those *symposiums* where the head of the Church, Leo the Tenth, encouraged his parasites and buffoons to debate on the greatest mysteries of religion; or the still better known conversations that took place at the supper-table of Baron Holbach. Had we any such report of the *petits soupers* at Athens, possibly

sōme resemblance might be found between Protagoras and D'Alembert, or between the brilliant, versatile, and unprincipled Philip of Orleans and Alcibiades. With Alcibiades there was certainly some party or friendly relation with Euripides; but it is vain to speculate on its nature. Whatever it was, it would do the tragic poet no good with Aristophanes; and if the story be true that Alcibiades and his associates marred the first and hindered the second representation of "The Clouds," the baffled and irritated satirist may have suspected Euripides of having a hand in his failure, and for that, and perhaps other weightier reasons, have put him down in his black book.

Certain it is that Aristophanes regarded Euripides with a feeling seemingly compounded of fear and contempt—of contempt for him as a scenic artist, and fear of him as a corrupter of youth. Yet it is difficult to detect the cause for such hostility; political motives can hardly have been at the root of it. Did Aristophanes detest the war with Peloponnesus, and yearn for the return of peace? so did Euripides. Did he regard the middle class of citizens as the pith and marrow of the commonwealth? Euripides thought so too. The husbandman who tilled his little plot of ground they both set above the shopkeeper, who applauded the demagogue of the hour, and spent, or more properly idled away, half his time on the stone benches of the Pnyx. Did the comic writer love Athens in his heart of hearts, though he often told her from the stage that she was a dolt and a dupe? the tragic writer loved her no less, and paid her compli-

ments sometimes not to the advantage of a play or a trilogy. Did the one look upon orators with an unfavourable eye? so did the other; while both agreed that nobility of birth and depth of purse did not necessarily constitute the best citizen. Yet, in spite of so much harmony in their opinions, there were differences that could not be bridged over; there was repugnance that defied reconciliation, and views of Athens as it had been, and Athens as it was then, which kept them in the compass of one town as far apart as if rivers and mountains, clime or race, had sundered them.

The enmity of Aristophanes increased with the years, and did not relax with the death of Euripides. The first known attack upon him was made in his comedy of "The Acharnians" or "The Charcoal-Burners." The last was made two years after "sad Electra's poet" had been struck down by a yet more "insatiate archer" than Aristophanes himself. The spirit that breathes in "The Acharnians" reappears, but with increased bitterness, in "The Frogs," and to sharp censure on Euripidean art is added still sharper on Euripidean theology. Some modern writers on the subject of the Greek drama have contemplated Euripides through the eyes of his great satirist. They might, perhaps, have done better to consider, before following their witty leader, whether he was guiding them in the right road; whether the comic writer's objections rested on patriotic or moral, or on party or personal grounds. Aristophanes was a stubborn reactionist: the men of Marathon and Platæa, of

Salamis and Mycale, he held to be the type of good Athenians. The new schools appeared to him in the same light as Greek philosophy in general appeared to the sturdy old Sabine Cato—schools of impudence and lying. Pericles himself he seems never to have really liked, but set him below Myronides and Thucydides, men of the good old time, for the return of which, as all reactionists must ever do, he yearned in vain. Euripides, on the other hand, was a man of the new time, perhaps a little beyond as well as of it. More cheerful views of humanity, ampler range of inquiry, greater freedom of thought, supplanted in his mind the gloomy superstition or the slavish faith of a past generation, with whom an eclipse was a token of the wrath of the gods, and by whom the sun was thought to be no bigger than a heavy-armed soldier's buckler. "Between the pass and fell incensed points" of two such opposites there could be nothing but collision; and the tragic poet laboured under this serious disadvantage, that *he* could not bring his antagonist on the stage.

Yet the most ardent admirer of Euripides is compelled to allow that this indefatigable writer of plays and laborious student can hardly be ranked among successful poets. "It has been observed," says an eminent judge of Greek literature, "that the success of Euripides, if it is measured by the prizes which he is said to have gained, would not seem to have been very great; and perhaps there may be reason to suspect that he owed much of the applause which he obtained in his lifetime to the favour of a party, which

was strong rather in rank and fortune than in numbers,—the same which is said to have been headed by Alcibiades."—"It is not quite certain that, even in the latter part of his career, Euripides was so popular as Sophocles. In answer to a question of Socrates, in a conversation with Xenophon, probably heard during the latter part of the Peloponnesian war, Sophocles is mentioned as indisputably the most admirable in his art." * If, according to this very probable suggestion, Euripides were the poet of the few and not of the Athenians in general, his frequent failure to win the ivy wreath may easily be explained. Democracy, though in all times it delights in clubs, is very jealous of coteries, especially if composed of men well-to-do in the world, or of men noted for their learning or refinement, and particularly jealous would all old-fashioned Cecropids be of a club in which Alcibiades was chairman. If, however, the wayward Phidippides† of the comedy may sometimes have hindered the poet's success in a theatrical contest, he may as probably have atoned for this grievance at home by obtaining for him a better reception abroad. "There were dwellers out of" Attica, without going to the realm of the Birds to find them. And among the dependencies of Athens, in the tributary islands and among the Greeks of the Lesser Asia, where Alcibiades had much influence, he may have been an efficient patron of the often, at home, mortified dramatist.

* Thirlwall's Hist. of Greece, iv. 273.

† Phidippides, in "The Clouds" of Aristophanes, is reputed to be a caricature of Alcibiades.

An historian, who wrote centuries after Euripides had passed beyond these and other vexations, cannot conceal his surprise that one Xenocles should have been the successful competitor in a contest with the son of Mnesarchus. He fairly calls the judges and spectators on the occasion a parcel of fools—dunderheads unworthy to bear the name of Athenian. But in missing the first or even the second crown, Euripides only fared alike with Æschylus and Sophocles; and that, with such samples of the two latter as have come to our hands, is a much more remarkable circumstance than the one it puzzled Arrian to account for.* What dramatic giants must they have been who strove for the mastery with the old Marathonian soldier, and with the Shakespeare of the Grecian world! Perhaps another cause occasionally cost Euripides the crown. He, like Ben Jonson, was at times perverse in the choice or in the treatment of his subjects. Even from the satire of Aristophanes it is plain that he had an unlucky propensity to tread on debatable, and even dangerous, ground. By his innovations in legendary stories, by occasionally tampering with criminal passion, by perhaps carrying to excess his fondness for mere stage effect, he perplexed or offended his audience, not inclined to accept as an apology for the exhibition of wicked characters his plea that in the end they were all well punished for their sins.† Even his constant applauder from the benches, Socrates, had, it is said, once to implore him to cut out from a play certain offensive lines; and a story preserved by a

* Various Histories, v. † Valerius Maximus.

Roman anecdotist shows that occasionally he was obliged to come on the stage himself, and crave the spectators to keep their seats until the end of the performance.* It seems that Euripides could give a tart reply to his audience when their opinions happened to differ from his own; for when the whole house demanded that an offensive passage or sentiment in a tragedy should be struck out, he said, "Good people, it is *my* business to teach you, and not to be taught by you." How the "good people" took this curt rebuff is not recorded; but if they damned his play, he at least did not, as Ben Jonson did, sulk for a few years and leave the "loathèd stage" in dudgeon, after venting his wrath on the public by an abusive ode and some stinging epigrams. On the contrary, Euripides went on preparing plays for the greater and lesser seasons of the theatrical period, until he left Athens and his enemies therein—for ever.

Amid frequent disappointments, and smarting under the lash of the comic poets—for we may be sure that where an Aristophanes led the way, others, however inferior to him, would follow eagerly—Euripides at a moment of universal dismay perhaps enjoyed some personal consolation. The mighty host which Athens had sent to Syracuse had been nearly annihilated. Of forty thousand citizens or allies that had gone forth, ten thousand only survived. Of her vast armament—*vast* if we bear in mind that her free population fell below that of many English fourth-rate cities—not a war-galley, not a transport-ship returned to Peiræus: of

* Valerius Maximus.

her soldiers, a handful only found refuge in a friendly Sicilian town. The last months of autumn in 413 B.C. were months of national consternation and household grief. Not long since we were reading of the general aspect of mourning for the slain at Berlin and other German cities. The mourning in Athens was of a deeper dye, since it was accompanied by dismay, if not despair, for the immediate future. Syracuse had been to Athens what Moscow was for Napoleon. Yet early perhaps in the next year there reached the "violet Queen" at first rumours, then credible reports, and at last the glad assurance, that any Athenian prisoner who could recite scenes or passages from the dramas of Euripides was taken out of the dreary stone-quarries of Syracuse, was kindly entreated in Sicilian homes, was nursed if sick or wounded, and if not presently restored to freedom (for such self-denial the captors prized their captives too highly), yet treated not as a slave, but as a welcome and honoured guest. Some indeed—how few or how many cannot be told—were suffered to return to Attica; and of these—poor gleanings after a bloody reaping—some can hardly have failed to go to the house of their deliverer, and with faltering voice and tearful eyes implored the gods, since *they* could not, to reward him. "Little thought we," they may be imagined to have said to him, "when we saw represented in your 'Trojan Women' the desolation of a hostile city, troops of warriors dragged in chains to the black ships of the Achæans, tender and delicate princesses told off to their allotted owners; or again, in your 'Suppliants,'

the wives of the slain weeping for their husbands denied burial; or that bloody meadow before the seven-gated Thebes strewn with the dead in your 'Phœnicians'—little then thought we that these mimic shows were but shadows of what we beheld on the banks of the Asinarus on that dreary October morning, when, faint and worn by our night-march, and maddened by thirst, captain and soldier, hoplite and peltast, we rushed into its stream, careless of the archers that lined its banks, and hardly recking of the iron sleet that struck down our best and bravest. By the magic of your song, though 'sung in a strange land,' we poor survivors were rescued and redeemed from graves and the prison-house, from hunger and nakedness, from the burning sun and the sharp night-frosts of autumn, and from what was as hard to bear, the scoffs of the insolent foe gazing down upon us from morn to eve, and aggravating by brutal taunts and ribald jests the pains of the living and the terrors of the dying." If the character of Euripides may be inferred from his writings, the most pathetic of Greek tragic poets—he who sympathised with the slave, he who so tenderly depicted women—wept at such moments with those who were weeping before him, and was cheered by these proofs that he had not written or lived in vain.

The "Orestes" was the last play exhibited at Athens by Euripides; and he must have quitted that city shortly afterwards, if he was in exile for two years. He was a self-banished man; at least no cause is assigned for his departure. Of the three great dramatic

poets whose works have in part been preserved, one only died in his birthplace. Æschylus quitted Athens in dudgeon at a charge of sacrilege, and Euripides ended his days at a foreign court. After a short sojourn in Magnesia, he went to Pella, the capital of the then small, and in the eyes of republican Greeks unimportant, kingdom of Macedonia. He was invited to it by the reigning sovereign, Archelaus, who in his way was a sort of Lorenzo de' Medici, attracting to his court artists, poets, and philosophers, and corresponding with them when at a distance. Among those whom he invited was Socrates; but he, who cared for neither money nor goods, and who spoke his mind pretty freely at all times and to all people, declined going to Pella, thinking perhaps that he would make an indifferent courtier, and knowing that despots have (as well as long hands) their caprices. Archelaus—the Macedonian kings always affected to be zealously Hellenic—established a periodical Olympic festival in honour of Jupiter and the Muses, and perhaps spoke Greek as his native tongue, and with as good accent as Frederick the Great is said to have spoken French. At Pella Euripides met with a reception that may have led him to regret his not sooner quitting litigious and scurrilous Athens, where housewives abominated his name and doubtless pitied Chœrilla and Melitto, and where orthodox temple-goers were scandalised by his theological opinions. Lucian mentions a report that the poet held some public office in Macedonia, which, seeing that he never meddled with even parish business at home, is scarcely probable. As little likely is it that

he turned flatterer of kings in his later days. We can as soon believe that the grim Dante became a parasite at the court of Can Grande della Scala. Aristotle, indeed, a more trustworthy authority than Lucian, tells the following story:—Decamnichus, a young Macedonian, and a favourite of the king, gave deep offence to Euripides by remarks on his bad breath. Complaint being made, the indiscreet youth was handed over to the incensed poet, with the royal permission to flog him; and soundly flogged he seems to have been, since Decamnichus bore his chastisement in mind for six years, and then relieved his feelings by encouraging some friends or acquaintances, Euripides being out of reach, to murder Archelaus.*

At the Macedonian court Euripides was not the only Athenian guest. His friend Agathon, flying perhaps from duns, critics, or public informers, found a royal city a pleasanter residence than a democratic one. There, was the celebrated musical composer, Timotheus, whom, when he was hissed at the Odeum some years before, Euripides is said to have consoled by predicting that "he would soon have the audience at his feet"—a prophecy that was fully realised. His presence at Pella may have been convenient to Euripides, who was then employed in putting the last touches to, if not actually composing, two of his finest plays—"The Bacchanals" and the "Iphigenia at Aulis." There, too, was Chœrilus, an epic poet, who celebrated in Homeric verse the wars of the Greeks with Darius and Xerxes. The society at King Archelaus's table,

* Aristotle, Politics, v. 10, sec. 20.

so richly furnished with celebrities, very probably resembled the better-known assemblages at Sans Souci; but we do not read that the Macedonian prince put on his crown, as Frederick the Great did his cocked-hat, when his guests, *Bacchi pleni*, were becoming personal, or trespassing on the royal preserve of politics.

Euripides did not long enjoy "retired leisure." He died at Pella in the 76th year of his age, in the year 406 B.C., having, as is supposed, quitted Athens in 408. But his enemies, so far as it lay with them, did not permit him to depart in peace, or even in reputable fashion. One report, current indeed long after his decease, makes him to have been torn to pieces by mastiffs set upon him by two rival poets, Arrhidæus and Cratenas; another, that he was killed by women when on his way to keep an assignation. This bit of scandal is probably an echo of his ill-repute at home as a woman-hater; and the story of the mastiffs may be a disguise of the fact that he was "cut up" by Macedonian theatrical critics. Yet one who had been handled as he was by Aristophanes and survived, might well have set at nought all dogs, biped or quadruped: and as to nocturnal trysts, they are seldom proposed, or at least kept, by gentlemen over threescore and ten.*

* This story of dogs and angry women is indeed noticed in some verses ascribed to Sophocles, who, as Schlegel says, uttered "some cutting sayings against Euripides." To readers interested in the matter, it may be convenient to be told that it is mentioned by Athenæus, book xiii. p. 557. Against Sophocles, if the gossip collected by Plutarch is accepted, there were also some "sayings" of a similar kind, and far less creditable to him.

Far more pleasant is it to know that Sophocles was deeply affected by his death, and in the next play he produced forbade the actors to wear crowns or their usual gorgeous dresses. The Athenians were prone to unavailing regret. Often they would say in their haste, "We are betrayed," and banish or put to death men who had served them well. Socrates had not been dead many years, before, with "woe that too late repented," they acknowledged having condemned a just man, and turned rabidly on his accusers for misleading them. And so, when Euripides was no more, they sent envoys to Pella to bring home his remains. But his host Archelaus would not part with them, and buried them with much pomp and circumstance; and his countrymen were fain to content themselves with a cenotaph on the road from Peiræus to the city, and with a bust or statue of the poet, which they placed in the Dionysiac theatre. They,

> "Slowly wise and meanly just,
> To buried merit raised the tardy bust;"

and they were not the first, nor will they be the last, of nations, to imagine posthumous homage compensation for years of detraction. Books or furniture that had belonged to Euripides were much sought for and highly prized by their possessors; and Dionysius of Syracuse, himself a dramatic poet, and not an unsuccessful one, purchased at a high price his tablets and pen, and dedicated them in the Temple of the Muses in his own capital. "They kept his bones in Arqua;" and there was seemingly, for centuries after

he was quietly inurned, a deep interest, and even a tender sentiment, attached to his tomb. It was situated near the confluence of two rivers, where there appears to have been a house or caravansary, at which travellers refreshed themselves, attracted by the purity of the air. Of the rivers, one was noted for the unwholesome character of its water.* From another account it may be inferred that the tomb was much visited, even if pilgrimages were not made to it.†

On his cenotaph was graven the following inscription:—

"To Hellas' bard all Hellas gives a tomb:
On Macedon's far shores his relics sleep:
Athens, the pride of Greece, was erst his home,
Whom now all praise and all in common weep."‡

These lines, attributed to Thucydides the historian, or to Timotheus the musician, are difficult to reconcile with the caricature-portraits of him by Aristophanes; yet are consistent with the opinion that it was the conservative party in Athens, and not Athenians generally, that were hostile to him in life, or to the memory of—

"Our Euripides, the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common,
Till they rose to touch the spheres."§

In one thing he was happier than Sophocles—"op-

* Vitruvius, viii. c. 3, 'Mortifera.'
† Ammianus, xxvii. c. 4.
‡ Translated by Mr Paley.
§ Browning, 'Balaustion.'

portunitate mortis"—in the priority of his death; since he lived not, as his great rival did, long enough to hear of the sentence passed on the victorious generals at Arginusæ, of the capture of the Athenian fleet at the Goat River, and of the utter, hopeless, irretrievable ruin of the city he had celebrated so often in immortal verse, admonished so wisely, and loved so well.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCENIC PHILOSOPHER.

"In all his pieces there is the sweet human voice, the fluttering human heart."—KENELM DIGBY.

WHETHER it were devised by friend or foe, the title of "Scenic Philosopher" for Euripides was given by one who had read his writings attentively.* His early studies, his intercourse with Socrates and other philosophers of the time, encouraged in so contemplative a mind as his habits of speculation on human and divine nature, and on such physical science as then existed. And as regarded dramatic composition, he was the first to bring philosophy on the stage. The sublime and gloomy genius of Æschylus was far more active than contemplative. His sentences are masses of concrete thought, when he descends from mere passion or imagination. Such inquiries as occupied Euripides appeared to him, as they did to Aristophanes, profane, or at the best idle, curiosity.

* It appears as an accepted title in Vitruvius's work on Architecture, book viii.

To Æschylus, the new rulers of Olympus, and the Titans they supplanted, were persons as real as Miltiades or Themistocles. To him, Olympus was but a yet more august court of Areopagus, and Fates and Furies were dread realities, not metaphysical abstractions. Sophocles lived for art: in his devotion to it, and in the unruffled calmness of his temper, he was an Hellenic Goethe; one, the central fire of whose genius, while it glowed under all he wrote, rarely disturbed the equanimity of his spirit. Moral or theological problems vexed him not. He cared not for the physics of Anaxagoras. Protagoras's sceptical disquisitions touched him no nearer than Galileo's discoveries touched Shakespeare, or Hume's Essays Samuel Johnson. The Jupiter of Sophocles was the Jupiter of Phidias; his Pallas Athene, the living counterpart of her image on the Acropolis. In abstaining from such questions, he and Æschylus were perhaps wiser than Euripides—considered as an artist—was in his fondness for them. Had Shakespeare been deeply versed in Roger Bacon's works, or in those of Aquinas, his plays would not have been better, and might have been worse, for such physical or metaphysical studies. Entertainments of the stage are meant for the many rather than for the few; and subjects that the many, if they listen to them at all, can scarcely fail to misinterpret, it is safer, as well as more artistic, to avoid.

There were, however, at the time when Euripides was writing for the theatre, especially after he had passed middle age, changes silently at work in Athens

that rendered contact between poets and philosophers almost unavoidable. The rapid growth of speculative and rhetorical studies in the age, and perhaps with the sanction, of Pericles, has already been noticed. The understanding, hardly affected by the simple training of the young in the Æschylean period, had become, fifty years later, the primary aim of liberal education. He who could recite the whole Iliad or Odyssey was now looked upon, when compared with an acute rhetorician, as little better than a busy idler—all very well, perhaps, for enlivening the guests at a formal supper, or entertaining a loitering group in the streets. Even fools have sometimes portentous memories, but no fool could handle adroitly the weapons of a sound logician. Man was born to be something better than a parrot; he was meant to cultivate and to use "discourse of reason." To argue logically upon almost any premises,—to have words at command, to be ready in reply, fertile in objection, averse from granting propositions, to possess much general knowledge, were accomplishments which no well-educated young Athenian, aspiring to make a figure in public, could do without. The imaginative epoch of Æschylus was departing, the scientific epoch of Aristotle was approaching, and the analytical stamp of Euripides's mind, great as its poetical force was, complied with those tendencies of the time.

In thus reflecting the spirit of the age, Euripides only did what others before him had done, and what great poets will ever continue to do:—

> "In ancient days the name
> Of poet and of prophet was the same:"

the genuine poet being always in advance of his fellow-men, and therefore frequently misunderstood or undervalued by them. The era of Dante is as deeply stamped, both on his prose and verse, as if he had designed to portray it. He belonged partly to a period that was passing away, and partly to one that was near at hand. Trained in the lore of the schoolmen, he has something in common with Duns Scotus and the Master of Sentences; while by his homage to Virgil and Statius, he anticipated in his tastes the revival of classical literature. Milton, affected by the influence of Jonson and Fletcher, composed in his youth a masque and songs of Arcady; in his mature manhood, the serious and severe Independent is manifest in all he wrote. Schiller is the herald of a revolutionary period, impatient of and discontented with the present. Pope, in his moral essays and satires, represents a time when sense and decorum ranked among the cardinal virtues, and when loftier and more robust forms of imagination or faith were accounted extravagances. To this general law Euripides was no exception. He went before them, and so was misinterpreted by many among whom he lived. Within half a century after his death, his name stood foremost on the roll of Greek dramatic poets. If not a deeper, a more genial spirit—a spirit we constantly meet with in Euripidean plays—had superseded the grim theology of the Marathonian period; stage-poetry was indeed shorn of some of its grandeur, but it gained, in recompense for what it lost, profounder human feelings.

That the Athenian theatre was not only a national

but a religious institution, and to what extent and in what particulars it was so, has already been told in the volume of this series assigned to Æschylus. There had been, however, after the Persian had been humbled and Hellas secured and exalted, a silent change in the faith of the Athenian people, as well as in their mental training. As years rolled on over their renovated city, though the forms of their myths and legends were retained, living belief in them was on the wane. They were accepted as respectable traditions, and when they recorded the brave deeds of their forefathers, were jealously cherished, but no longer regarded with awe, or exempted from innovation. In the time of Euripides, there had appeared an historian, or perhaps more properly a chronicler—a man of much faith and honest piety, and yet one who scrupled not to canvass the credibility of tale and tradition, and sometimes even to find a secular explanation for spiritual doctrines. Herodotus, as well as Euripides, was under the influence of the age, though he usually apologises for his doubts. Yet doubt he did. The Father of History, no less than the pupil of Anaxagoras, disbelieved in the baneful effects of an eclipse, and had, for his time, very fair notions of geography; and if he thought that the gods envy human greatness, and sooner or later punish the pride of man, his faith, as contrasted with that of Phrynicus and Æschylus, was feeble, and his view of Destiny and the Benign Deities savoured more of habit than earnest conviction. In such matters the beginning of distrust is the dawn of a rationalistic epoch. The ancient faith of the

Athenians in the names and acts of their founders is on a par with that in the once accredited tale of Brutus and other Trojans settling in Britain; or of Joseph of Arimathea planting the first shoot of the holy thorn at Glastonbury. Joseph and Brutus, like Cecrops and Erectheus, have vanished from history, and nothing except the genius of a poet could recall from the shades and clothe with living interest King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Readers will perhaps pardon a short digression, if it tend to throw light on the dramatic art of Euripides, when contrasted with that of Æschylus; or rather, on a change that took place in the taste of their respective audiences.

The story of Orestes, in the handling of which Æschylus and Sophocles stand farthest apart from Euripides, is chosen as perhaps the most striking instance of the struggle between old faith and new rationalism, as exhibited in the Athenian drama. To the elder of these poets the symbolisms of the legend were perfectly clear. Apollo, a purifying and avenging god, prescribes the duty and the mode of retribution, and protects the avengers of blood. After the command has been issued to visit the death of Agamemnon on his murderers, Pylades, in the legend, though almost a mute person in the drama, is Apollo's principal agent in nerving Orestes to the execution of his dreadful task. Pylades was a Crisean by descent. Now, from the Homeric hymn to Apollo, it appears that the original Pythian temple was in the domain of the town of Crisa. At Crisa Orestes dwelt as an exile;

and it is from that town that, accompanied by his monitor, the destined avenger set forth on his errand to Mycenæ. The near connection between Pylades and Apollo is implied also in the belief that he was the founder of the Amphictyonic Council which was held at Delphi. In the "Eumenides" he does not appear; his function ceased when, in the "Libation Bearers," Clytemnestra and her paramour had paid the penalty of their crime: but in the latter play, it is the reproach of Pylades which screws to the sticking-point the failing courage of Orestes.

Sophocles had studied the same old legend. In his "Electra," the bearer of the false intelligence that Orestes has been killed in the chariot-race at the Pythian games reports himself as sent by Phanoteus, the Phocian, a friend of Clytemnestra, and so a likely person to apprise her that she need no longer live in dread of her son. Now this Phanoteus is no other than a foe, though a brother, of Crisus, the father of Strophius, and grandfather of Pylades. Like Orosmanes and Ahriman, the brothers—Strophius and Phanoteus—dwelt in hostile regions: the former in the bright and cheerful city of Crisa, where the sun-god had his first temple; the latter in another Crisa, a dark and dreary spot, where Apollo's enemies, giants or gigantic warriors — Tityus, Autolycus, Phorbas, and the Phlegyans—had their abode. Agamemnon's children accordingly look to Strophius for the coming avenger; Ægisthus and Clytemnestra to Phanoteus for timely warning of his approach.*

* These remarks on the symbolism in the Orestean legend are

It is not necessary to probe further the original legend. Enough has been shown to prove that Æschylus and Sophocles wove into their Orestean story portions of it, and therefore thought it suitable for their tragedies. Euripides, on the contrary, seems to have quite neglected it. He makes, indeed, Pylades a Delphian, but by banishing him from his country, after the work of retribution is complete, he severs the links of the symbolic story.

Is there any improbability in supposing Euripides, a man of the new era, to have viewed the grim though picturesque stories of the old and waning times as inconsistent with the bright, free, and intelligent Athens in which he dwelt? The pupil of Anaxagoras and Prodicus might well regard a people as little beyond the verge of barbarism for whom the priest was the philosopher, whose heroes yet strove with wild beasts, who trembled at the phenomena of nature, and among whom ignorance generally prevailed. And among such a people it was that the legends were created and cherished. Imagination was strong, while reason was weak; but did it therefore follow that men capable of reason should always remain children? Perhaps some insight into the feelings of Euripides on theological questions may be gleaned from the story of Socrates, who, while scrupulously worshipping the gods of the state, made no secret that he regarded them as little more than masks — nay, often as unworthy disguises — of the

taken, greatly abridged, from K. O. Müller's "Essay on the 'Eumenides' of Æschylus," p. 131, English translation.

divine nature. For the opinions of the philosopher, the reader is referred to the volume of this series in which the writings of Xenophon are treated of. There is, however, a remarkable passage in Plato's dialogue entitled 'Phædo,' in which Socrates enumerates as one among the boons death will confer on him, the privilege he will have, when he has shaken off this mortal coil, of knowing better the great gods, and of seeing them with a clearness of vision unattainable by mortals on earth. Euripides, on his side, may have held it to be part of a poet's high position to hint, if not to expound formally to his hearers, that the deities whom the tragedians represented as severe, revengeful, and relentless beings, were merciful as well as just, —that the humanity of Prometheus was at least as divine as the tyranny of Jupiter, or the feuds and caprices of Apollo and Artemis. It was, perchance, among the offences given by Euripides to the comic poets, that his spiritual and intangible god could not, like Neptune, Iris, Hercules, or Bacchus, be parodied by them on the stage. The idols of the temple were by the vulgar esteemed true portraits of the beings whom they affected to revere, but at whom they were always ready to laugh. Neptune and Hercules, in the comedy of the "Birds" of Aristophanes, might be bribed by savoury meats, or hide themselves under an umbrella; but the "great gods" whom the pious Socrates yearned to behold were beyond the reach, and perhaps the comprehension, of the satirist.

We can afford only to hint that the poet's religious opinions, so far as they can be gathered from his

writings, may easily have been misconstrued by men of the time, who appear to have had other motives also for disliking him. The singularity of his habits may have been one reason for their distaste of his opinions. If, as is possible, he belonged to none of the political factions of his time—neither a Cleonite, nor a partisan of Nicias, nor a hanger-on of the gracious-mannered and giddy Alcibiades—here may have been a rock of offence. "Depend upon it, my Phidippides, no man of such odd ways as the son of Mnesarchus can be sound in morals or politics. Folks that shut themselves up have something in them wrong requiring seclusion." Perhaps a brief inquiry into his views on some matters may help to a better understanding of his opinions generally. Was he a bad citizen, as many reputed him to be? Was he a woman-hater to the extent he is accused of being, and beyond the provocation given by his wives? What were his notions about the condition and treatment of slaves? Can we discover from his writings how he thought or voted in politics? Was he an idle dreamer? Was he a home-bred Diagoras of Melos, only less respectable, because less courageous, than that open scoffer? Bad taste he may have had, but it does not follow that he was therefore a bad man.

The charge of being a bad citizen scarcely accords with the political opinions of Euripides, so far as they can be inferred from his plays. A similar accusation has been brought against Plato; and both the one and the other may have proceeded from similar causes. Neither

the poet nor the philosopher took part in public affairs, or held, so far as we know, office under the state. By the speech-loving Athenians, for whom the law courts and the assembly of the people were theatres open all the year round, this was regarded as an odious singularity, if not a grave neglect of civic duty. Socrates, meditative as he was, could strike a good blow in the field when required, and filled an office under the thirty tyrants with credit to himself. Euripides and Plato may fairly have thought the public had advisers enough and to spare—that a good citizen could serve his country with his pen or his lectures as effectively as by becoming one of the clamorous demagogues who grew under every hedge. It will hardly be denied that the patriarch of the Academy strengthened the foundations or enlarged the boundaries of moral science. Is the poet quite disentitled to a similar concession? Has any stage-poet, if we except Shakespeare, supplied moralists and philosophers with more grave or shrewd maxims than he has done? Has any ancient poet taken wider or more liberal views of humanity?

Again, the scenic philosopher was reputed unsound in his theology; and this, no doubt, is an offence in every well-regulated community. Without going beyond the bounds of England, we find that it was no want of will on the part of their opponents that saved Chillingworth, Hobbes, or even John Locke, from something akin to the cup of hemlock tendered to Socrates. Many thousands of honest English householders accounted Milton a heretic, a traitor, and a man of evil life and conversation. To allow our view

of his character to be biassed by a person's opinions is not a discovery of modern times. It was by no means prudent for any one residing in Athens to be wiser than his neighbours in physical science, or to speak or write of the gods otherwise than custom sanctioned. The most orthodox of spectators at the theatre was justly shocked by being told, that the gods he had no scruples about laughing at in the "Frogs" or "Birds" of Aristophanes, were really little more than men's inventions—caricatures rather than portraits of the deity as contemplated by the philosopher. Why could not these dreamers be content with the gods that satisfied Solon the wise, or Aristides the just? And under every class of these offences Euripides seems to have come. He was neither a useful citizen nor a sound believer; he meddled with matters too high for him; the heresies he had imbibed in youth from Anaxagoras clung to him in riper years; and, like his tutor, he deserved a decree of exile at least. He was a proud fellow, and thought himself too clever or too good for mixed society. He read much—he talked little; and was that proper conduct in an Athenian? In an evil hour came the Sophists to Athens, and it was with Sophists alone that Euripides delighted to consort. So reasoned the vulgar, after the wisdom that was in them, and so they will reason unto the end of time. There can, however, be no doubt that Euripides in his heart despised the popular religion. He could not accept traditional belief: his masters in philosophy had trained him to think for himself; and with his strong sympathy for his fellow-men, he strove,

ineffectually indeed, to deliver them, as he had been delivered himself, from the bondage of custom, from apathy or ignorance. Compelled, by the laws that regulated scenic exhibitions, to deal with the gods as the state prescribed, or the multitude required, he could only insinuate, not openly proclaim, his opinions, either on politics or religion. Yet if unsocial, he was not timid, and it is really with extraordinary boldness that he attacks soothsayers in his plays. He puts into the mouth of the ingenuous Achilles —then a youth whose heart had not been hardened by war—the following attack on Calchas the seer :—

" His lustral lavers and his salted cakes
With sorrow shall the prophet Calchas bear :
Away ! The prophet !—what is he ? a man
Who speaks 'mongst many falsehoods but few truths,
Whene'er chance leads him to speak true ; when false,
The prophet is no more."

In the "Electra," Orestes says that he believes Apollo will justify his oracle, but that he deems lightly of human — that is, of professional — prophecies. Perhaps his dislike of prophets may have received new edge and impulse from the mischief done by them in encouraging by their idle predictions the Athenians to undertake the expedition to Sicily. And a time was at hand when the dupes of the soothsayers viewed their pretensions with as small favour as Euripides himself did. Deep was the wrath in the woe-stricken city, when the worst reports of the destruction of their fleet and army at Syracuse were confirmed by eye-

witnesses, against the orators who had advised, and the oracle-mongers and prophets who had guaranteed, the success of that disastrous expedition.*

There was, indeed, much in the Homeric theology that, however well suited to the artist, was intolerable to the philosopher. The gods themselves were criminals, and Euripides made no secret that he thought them so. "He could not," says K. O. Müller, "bring his philosophical convictions into harmony with the contents of the old legends, nor could he pass over their incongruities." Yet far advanced as he was beyond his time, the time itself was not quite unprogressive. Æschylus, who belonged to an earlier generation, and Sophocles, who avoided every disturbing force as perilous to the composure of art, accepted the Homeric deities as they found them. Nevertheless faith in them was in the sear and yellow leaf, and the reverence that should accompany old age was nearly worn out. The court of Areopagus in Athens was, without any similar external violence, sharing the fate of our High Commission Court in the seventeenth century. It no longer took cognisance of every slight offence against religion; it consulted its own safety by letting the gods, in many instances, look after their own affairs. Euripides was at the most a pantheist. He believed in the unity of God, in His providence, His omnipotence, His justice, His care for human beings. Supreme mind or intelligence was his Jupiter—the destroyer of the Typhon, unreasoning faith, his Apollo. Aristophanes, who professed to believe, and

* Thucydides, viii. c. 1.

not Euripides, who professed to doubt, was the real scoffer.

There is space for only a few samples of the moral opinions of Euripides. Shakespeare's reputation with posterity might have fared very scurvily had there been a great comic poet among his detractors, opposed to him in theology or politics, or jealous of the company kept by him at the Mermaid. Only impute to the author personally the sentiments he ascribes to Iago, Iachimo, Richard of Gloucester, Edmund in "Lear," or Lady Macbeth,—refer to certain things connected with his marriage or his poaching,—and the purest in morals as well as the loftiest in thought of our own scenic poets would have made as poor a figure as Euripides did in his time, whether it were on the grounds of his creed, his civic character, or his private life and conversation. "Envie," says Chaucer, in his 'Legende of Good Women,'

> "Is lavender to the court alway,
> For she ne parteth neither night ne day
> Out of the house of Cæsar;"

and the envy of one generation becomes with the credulous the fact of another. "In the first place," as Mr Paley most justly observes, "many of his sentiments which may be said to wear an equivocal complexion, as the famous one,—

> "If the tongue swore, the heart abides unsworn,"—

have been misconstrued as undermining the very foundations of honour and virtue. They are assumed to be

general statements, whereas they really have only a special reference to existing circumstances, or are at least susceptible of important modifications." The same may be said of a verse of Euripides that Julius Cæsar was fond of quoting;—

> "If ever to do ill be good, 'tis for a crown;
> For *that* 'tis lawful to push right aside:
> In other things let virtue be the guide."

But the Roman perverted to his own ends a sentiment well suited to the character—a false and violent one—of the speaker, Eteocles.*

Some injury has been done to Euripides by the abundance of fragments from his plays that are preserved. Undoubtedly many of these "wear an equivocal complexion,"—as, for example—

> "What *must* be done by mortals *may* be done;"

or—

> "Nor shameful aught unless one deem it so;"

but we know not the speakers of the words, nor the circumstances under which they were spoken.

What are the proofs of an often-repeated assertion that Euripides was a sensual poet? On the score of indecency the comic poets are rather damaging witnesses—to themselves. Have the Germans, have we ourselves, no poets infinitely more culpable in this respect than Euripides? A very third-rate contributor to the English drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would the Greek poet have been, had he written nothing worse than we find

* Phœnician Women, v. 573.

in his extant plays or the fragments of his lost ones. And on this delicate question we have a most unexceptionable witness in his favour—no less a person than the decent and pious Aristophanes himself! The "Phædras" and "Sthenebœas" of Euripides, we are told by him, were dangerous to morals.* Yet in another of his comedies he says that in consequence of Euripides's plays women mended their manners.† Here, with a vengeance, has "a Daniel come to judgment!"—the woman-hater, it seems, had been preaching with some success to a female congregation. The purity of the poet's morals, so far as they can be inferred from his writings, is displayed in his Hippolytus, in the chaste Parthenopæus in the "Suppliant Women," in the Achilles of his "Iphigenia," and above all, in the character of the boy Ion. "Consecrated to Apollo, and devoting himself wholly to the service of the altar, he speaks of his patron god in language that would not dishonour a better cause. One cannot help feeling that the poet must have been at heart a good man who could make a virtuous asceticism appear in so amiable a light."‡

"Let me tell you," says Councillor Pleydell, "that Glossin would have made a very pretty lawyer, had he not been so inclined to the knavish side of his profession." It cannot be denied that Euripides has some tendency of the sort. He employs frequently, and seemingly without much compunction, the arts of falsehood and deceit. The tricksters in his tragedy

* "Frogs," 1049. † "Thesmoph." 398.

‡ Paley, Preface to Euripides.

are the forerunners of the tricksters of the New Comedy — the "fallax servus" of the Menandrian drama. But as respects truth, in the modern import of the word, the morality of the ancients was not that of the moderns. The latter profess to abhor a lie; the former—more prudently and consistently perhaps—made no professions at all on the subject. The crafty Ulysses, rather than the bold Achilles, is the type of an Achæan; Themistocles, far more than Aristides, that of an Athenian Greek. Euripides, who represents men as they are, and not as they ought to be, did not disdain to employ in his plays this common feature of his age and nation, but in none of them has he depicted such a thorough-going scoundrel as the Sophoclean Ulysses in the "Philoctetes."

In what sense of the word was Euripides a hater of women—for that he occasionally spoke ill of them is beyond doubt? His character is indeed a difficult one to interpret—on the surface full of inconsistencies; and seeing these only, it is easy to understand why he was less revered than Æschylus, less esteemed or beloved than Sophocles. Below the surface, however, it is possible to discover a certain unity of purpose in him, and it is traceable in his sentiments on the female sex. First, let the position of women among the Greeks in general be remembered. They lived in almost Oriental seclusion. What was expected from a good wife is shown in a very instructive passage of Xenophon's treatise, 'The Economist or Householder.'

Ischomachus, the principal speaker in the dialogue, describes how he had "trained his wife, at the time he

instructed her, an inexperienced girl of fourteen, to the duties of her position. The account that ensues of the functions of an Athenian married lady would be applicable, if we except the greater restriction on her personal liberty, to a hired housekeeper of the present day. Her business is to nurse her children, to maintain discipline among her slaves; to be diligent herself at her web, in the management of her kitchen, larder, and bakehouse, and in her care of the furniture, wardrobe, and household property of all kinds; to select a well-qualified stewardess to act under herself, but to allow no undue confidence in her to interfere with her own habits of personal superintendence; to remain continually within doors; she will find abundance of exercise in her walks to and from different parts of the premises, in dusting clothes and carpets, and baking bread or pastry." "From all this it appears, that what are now considered essential qualifications in a married lady of the upper class—presiding at her husband's table, receiving his guests, or enlivening by her conversation his hours of domestic retirement—entered as little into the philosopher's estimate of a model wife as into that of his countrymen at large. Like Pericles, Socrates"—and, we may add, Euripides—"could appreciate female accomplishments in an Aspasia or a Theodota,"* but hardly looked for them in wives so trained and employed as was that of Ischomachus.

If Euripides were generally a woman-hater, he was at least not always consistent in his aversion. No one of the Athenian stage-poets has written more to the

* Colonel Mure's Hist. of Greek Literature, v. 463.

credit of good women, or more delicately or tenderly delineated female characters. For this assertion it is sufficient to cite Polyxena in his "Hecuba," Macaria in "The Children of Hercules," Evadne in "The Suppliant Women," the sisterly devotion of Electra in his "Orestes," Iphigenia in both of the plays bearing her name, and the sublime self-sacrifice of the noble and loving Alcestis. Even Hecuba and Jocasta are braver and wiser than the men about them, and these old, afflicted, and discrowned queens have neither youth nor personal charms to recommend them. Phædra he represents not as a vicious woman, but as the helpless victim of an irate deity; while in the "Medea" the fierce and revengeful heroine has all our sympathy, while Jason has all our contempt.*

And if Euripides were reprehensible for his opinions on women, what shall we say of his antagonist Aristophanes? Had the wives and daughters of Athens no cause of complaint against their caricaturist? If the pictures drawn of them in his "Lysistrata" and "Thesmophoriazusæ" be not wholly fanciful, what woman sketched by Euripides would not be too good for such profligate companions? The female characters

* Adolph Schöll, the author of an excellent Life of Sophocles, reminds his readers that the very female characters which Euripides is sometimes taxed with selecting, because they were particularly wicked, for his themes, were brought on the stage by Sophocles in dramas now lost—*e. g.*, Phædra, Sthenebœa, Ino, Medea often, Ærope, Althæa, Eriphyle, &c. &c.; and he notices also that Euripides, in many of his dramas, atoned, if there was any occasion to do so, for his portraits of the bad, by his numerous delineations of good women.

of Sophocles are perhaps worthier of admiration than those of his rival; but the pencil that traced Antigone, Deianara, and Tecmessa, drew ideal heroines: that of Euripides painted human beings, creatures with strong passions, yet stronger affections, with a deep sense of duty, of religion, as in the instances of Theonoe in his "Helen," of Andromache, and Antigone,—women who may be esteemed or loved, women who walk the earth, sharing heroically, sympathising tenderly with, the sorrows and sufferings of their partners in affliction. The zealous champion of the gods of the state was, we have seen, an arch-scoffer at all loftier forms of belief; the satiric pen that wrote down Euripides as a hater of women was held by the arch-libeller of their sex.*

Nor was the humanity of the poet less conspicuous in his feelings towards slaves. And again we have to notice something inconsistent with his supposed

* Might not our Fletcher be fairly taxed with woman-hating by readers who pick out such passages only as suit their own views, or ascribe to the author himself the opinions he puts into the mouths of his *dramatis personæ*? The Greek poet has not written anything half so injurious to women as the following lines from the "Night-Walker," act ii. sc. 4:—

"Oh! I hate
Their noise, and do abhor the whole sex heartily.
They are all walking devils, harpies. I will study
A week together, how to rail sufficiently
Upon 'em all; and that I may be furnish't,
Thou shalt buy all the railing books and ballads
That malice has invented against women.
I will study nothing else, and practise 'em,
Till I grow fat with curses."

austere disposition. We have no reason for thinking that the lot of home-bred or purchased slaves was particularly hard in Athens; certainly they had there less rigorous masters than the Spartans or Romans were. But there can be little doubt of the contempt with which non-Hellenic races were viewed by Greeks in general, or of the broad line they drew between themselves and barbarians. Even in Attica, the happiness or misery of a bondman must have depended in great measure upon the disposition of his owner. He might be half starved or cruelly flogged—but no law protected him: overworked, without comment from the neighbours; tortured, if his evidence were required in a court of justice; cashiered, when his services were rendered useless by age or infirmity. Euripides, if his writings be in accordance with his practice, anticipated the humane sentiments of Seneca and the younger Pliny in his consideration for this, at the best, unhappy order of men. He did not regard it as the mark of an unsound mind to look on a slave as a human being. He introduces him in his plays as a faithful nurse, or an honest and attached herdsman, shepherd, or household servant. He endows him with good abilities, and at times shrewd and ready wit, with kindly affection to his fellows, and love and loyalty to his masters. He even goes almost to an extreme in putting into his mouth saws, maxims, and opinions meet for a philosopher. He perceived, and he strove to make others perceive, that servitude does not necessarily extinguish virtue or good sense. He left it to the comic poets to exhibit the slave as necessarily

a cheating, lying, and sensual varlet. He may have imbibed from his friend Socrates some of his humane notions on women or slaves, or he may have forestalled them; or, which is quite as possible, have reflected in his dramas a liberal feature of the time fostered alike by the poet and the philosopher.

The feelings of slaves towards a kind and gracious mistress are thus described in the "Alcestis." She, immediately after bidding the last farewell to her children, takes leave of her servants:—

> "All of the household servants wept as well,
> Moved to compassion for their mistress: she
> Extended her right hand to all and each,
> And there was no one of such low degree
> She spoke not to, nor had an answer from."—(B.)

And again, in the same play, the slave appointed to wait on Hercules thus expresses himself:—

> "Neither was it mine
> To follow in procession, nor stretch forth
> Hand, wave my lady dear a last farewell,
> Lamenting who to me and all of us
> Domestics was a mother: myriad harms
> She used to ward away from every one,
> And mollify her husband's ireful mood."—(B.)

The messenger, a slave, in the "Orestes," thus recounts to Electra his loyalty to her family:—

> "Hither I from the country came, and entered
> The gates, solicitous to hear the doom
> Of thee and of Orestes; for thy sire
> I ever loved, and in thy house was nurtured.

True, I am poor, yet not the less am loyal
To those who have been kind to me of yore."
—(Alford.)

Connected perhaps with his sympathy with women and an oppressed class of men is his practice of bringing on the scene young children. He puts them in situations that cannot fail to have touched the hearts of a susceptible people. In the "Iphigenia in Aulis," the infant Orestes is employed to work on Agamemnon's parental love. The little sons of Alcestis add to the pathos of her parting words. In the "Trojan Women," a drama of weeping and lamentation nearly "all compact," the fate of Astyanax is the most touching incident. In the "Andromache," the little Molossus is held up by his great-grandsire Peleus in order that he may loosen the cords by which his mother's hands are bound. Maternal love adds a human element to the wild and whirling passion of Medea. Racine, who profoundly studied Euripides, did not neglect this device for producing emotion. In his "Andromaque," Astyanax is made to contribute to the pity of the scene, although the etiquette of the French stage did not permit of his appearing on it. Did this innovation—if it were one—take its rise from a practice not uncommon in the law courts, for defendants to appeal to the mercy of the jurors by exhibiting their wives and children? Whether the courts borrowed it from the theatre, or the theatre from the courts, such a display, however foreign to our notions of the sobriety of justice, indicates a kind, if not an equi-

table feeling in the audience, and one which the advocate of the slave would share with them.

We must now dismiss the scenic philosopher, trusting that some of the facts, if not the arguments, adduced on his behalf, may prevail with English readers so far as to lead them to take a more favourable view of his character than has been given in some ancient or modern accounts of it. Had he been less philosophic, he would probably have been more successful at the time, and less obvious to critical shafts then and afterwards. Yet that so many of his works should have been preserved, can scarcely have been a mere accident. Some attraction or charm there was in them that touched the heart of Hellas from its eastern to its western border, and so held above water a fourth at least of his writings, when the deluge of barbarism or bigotry swept away so many thousands of Greek dramas, and among them some that had borne off the crown from Æschylus or Sophocles. "Sunt lacrimæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt." The very tenderness of Euripides, though taxed with effeminacy or degradation of art by critics of the Aristophanic school, may have had its influence in the salvage of seventeen plays and fragments of others, exceeding in number the sum of those of both his extant compeers.

Having passed in review the times, the life, and other circumstances relating to Euripides, we may now pass on to a survey of his dramas.

CHAPTER IV.

ALCESTIS. — MEDEA.

"She came forth in her bridal robes arrayed,
And 'midst the graceful statues, round the hall
Shedding the calm of their celestial mien,
Stood, pale, yet proudly beautiful, as they:
Flowers in her bosom, and the star-like gleam
Of jewels trembling from her braided hair,
And *death* upon her brow."

—FELICIA HEMANS.

PARTLY on account of its being the fourth play in the order of representation, as well as from a supposed comic vein in the character of Hercules, the "Alcestis" has been considered as a satiric after-piece, or at least a substitute for that appendage to the tragic trilogy. But no reader of this domestic play, whether in the original or translation, will find mirth or satirical banter in it. The happy ending may entitle it to be regarded as a comedy in the modern sense of the term, although until the very last scene it draws so deeply on one main element of tragedy, pity. At most, the "Alcestis" is what the French term *comédie larmoyante*. No one of the extant dramas of Euripides, as

whole, is so pathetic. The reader feels now, as the spectators doubtless felt at its representation, that it is not because of the rank of the sufferers we sympathise with them. It is not Admetus the king, but Admetus the husband, whom we commiserate: that she is a queen adds nothing to our admiration of the tender and self-devoting Alcestis. Among the faults found with this drama is one that sounds strangely to modern ears. It wrought, say the objectors, upon the feelings of spectators by an exhibition of woe beneath the dignity of the sufferers, who are therefore degraded by the pity excited on their behalf. This seems "hedging kings" with a most preposterous "divinity,"—setting them apart from common humanity by making them void of human affections. If to touch an audience through the medium of household sorrows were a blot in Greek tragedy, it will scarcely be accounted a blemish by modern readers.

The story of the "Alcestis" is founded upon some legend or tradition of northern Greece, probably brought thither from the East. The Fates have marked Admetus, king of Pheræ, in Thessaly, for death. Apollo has prevailed upon the grim sisters to grant him a reprieve on one condition—that he finds a substitute. In the first instance he applies to his father and mother, aged people, but they decline being vicariously sacrificed. His wife Alcestis alone will give her life for his ransom. Apollo does Admetus this good turn because he has himself, when condemned by Jupiter to serve in a mortal's house, been kindly treated by the Pheræan king. When the play opens,

the doom of Alcestis is at hand. She is sick unto death; and Death himself, an impersonation similar to that of Madness in the "Mad Hercules," is at the palace gate awaiting his prey. The grisly fiend, suspecting that Apollo intends a second time to defraud him of his dues by interposing for Alcestis as he had done for Admetus, is in no gracious mood; but the god assures him that his interest with the Fates is exhausted. The following scenes are occupied with the parting of the victim from her husband, her children, and her household, and a faithful servant describes the profound grief of them all. In the midst of tears and wailings, and just after death has claimed his own, an unlooked-for guest arrives. Hercules, most stalwart of mortals, but not yet a demigod, enters. He is on his road to Thessaly, sent on one more perilous errand by his enemy Eurystheus. He is struck by the signs of general woe in the household. He proposes to pass on to another friend of his in Pheræ, but Admetus will not hear of what he regards a breach of hospitable duties, and gives orders to a servant to take Hercules to a distant chamber, and there set meat and drink before him. The guest, much perplexed by all he sees, but foiled in his inquiries, and led to suppose that some female relative of Admetus is dead, goes to his dinner, prepared to enjoy it, although, under the circumstances, it must be a solitary meal. Unaware of the real state of things, he greatly scandalises his attendant by his appetite, and still more by breaking out into snatches of convivial songs. "Of all the gormandising and unfeeling ruffians

I ever met with," says the slave in waiting, "this fellow is the worst. He eats like a half-famished wolf, drinks in proportion, calls for more than is set before him, and sings, or rather howls, his ribald songs out of all tune,—

"'While we o' the household mourned our mistress—
mourned,
That is to say, in silence—never showed
The eyes, which we kept wetting, to the guest—
For there Admetus was imperative.
And so, here am I helping to make at home
A guest, some fellow ripe for wickedness,
Robber or pirate, while she goes her way
Out of her house.
. . . . . .
Never yet
Received I worse guest than this present one.'"—(B.)

"Nor content with being voracious and dainty, he drinks till the wine fires his brain."

Hercules marks the rueful visage of his attendant, and thinking that Admetus has bidden him be as cheerful as usual, the family affliction being only a slight one, rates him roundly for his woe-begone looks:

"*Hercules.* Why look'st so solemn and so thought-absorbed?
To guests, a servant should not sour-faced be,
But do the honours with a mind urbane.
Whilst thou, contrariwise, beholding here
Arrive thy master's comrade, hast for him
A churlish visage, all one beetle-brow—
Having regard to grief that's out of door!
Come hither, and so get to grow more wise.

Things mortal—know'st the nature that they have?
No, I imagine! whence could knowledge spring?
Give ear to me then! For all flesh to die
Is nature's due; nor is there any one
Of mortals with assurance he shall last
The coming morrow."—(B.)

And so on the old but ever-appropriate text, "Thou knowest that to die is common;" and the oft-renewed question, "Why seems it then particular to thee?" Hercules proceeds moralising—"philosophising even in his drink," as an old scholiast remarks. The pith, indeed, of Hercules's counsel is "Drink, man, and put a garland on thy head."

When, however, the attendant says—

"Ah! thou know'st nought o' the woe within these walls:"

the guest's curiosity is aroused. Can Admetus have deceived me? is it, then, not a distant kinswoman whom they are burying? have I been turning a house of mourning into a house of feasting? Tell me, good fellow, what has really chanced. The servant replies:

"Thou cam'st not at a fit reception-time:
With sorrow here beforehand; and thou seest
Shorn hair, black robes.
Hercules. But who is it that's dead?
Some child gone? or the aged sire, perhaps?
Servant. Admetus' wife, then, she has perished, guest.
Hercules. How say'st? and did ye house me all the same?
Servant. Ay: for he had thee in that reverence,
He dared not turn thee from the door away.
Hercules. O hapless, and bereft of what a mate!
All of us now are dead, not she alone;

Where is he gone to bury her? where am I
To go and find her?
Servant. By the road that leads
Straight to Larissa, thou wilt see the tomb
Out of the suburb, a carved sepulchre."—(B.)

But as soon as Hercules extracts from the servant the real cause of the family grief, all levity departs from him. He is almost wroth with his friend for such overstrained delicacy, and hurries out to render him such "yeoman's service" as no one except the strongest of mankind can perform. Alcestis has been laid in her grave; the mourners have all come back to the palace; and Death, easy in his mind as to Apollo, and secure, as he deems himself, from interruption, is making ready for a ghoulish feast on her corpse. But he has reckoned without the guest. He finds himself in the dilemma of foregoing his prey or being strangled, and he permits his irresistible antagonist to restore the self-devoted wife to the arms of her disconsolate and even more astonished husband.*

With the instinct of a great artist, Euripides centralises the interest of the action in Alcestis alone; and in order to show how perfect the sacrifice is, he endows the victim with every noble, tender, and loving

* Never has rationalising of old-world stories made a bolder stride than in the case of this play. Late Greek writers ascribe the decease of Alcestis to her having nursed her husband through a fever. She takes it herself, and is laid out for dead, when a physician, sharper-sighted than the rest of the faculty at the time, discovers that the vital spark is not extinct, and cheats death of his foe by remedies unluckily not mentioned for the benefit of posterity.

quality of woman. She stands as far apart from and above the other characters in the play as Una does in the first book of the 'Faery Queen.' For the Greek stage she is what Portia and Cordelia are for the English. If less heroic than Antigone or Electra, she is more human; the strength which opposition to harsh laws or thirst for "great revenge" lent to them, to her is supplied by the might of wifely love. Possibly it was this sublime tenderness that kept the memory of Alcestis green through ages in which the manuscripts of Euripidean dramas were lying among the rolls of Byzantine libraries, or the dust and worms of the monasteries of the West. Chaucer, in his 'Court of Love,' calls her the "Quenè's floure;" and in his 'Legende of Good Women' she is "under Venus lady and quene:"—

> "And from afer came walking in the Mede
> The God of Love, and in his hand a quene,
> And she was clad in real * habit grene:
> A fret of golde she haddè next her heer,
> And upon that a white corowne she bere
> With flourès smale."

With equally happy art—indeed, after Shakespeare's manner with his female personages—we are not formally told of her goodness; but we know from those around her that the loving wife is also a loving mother, a kind and liberal mistress. Even the sorrow of the Chorus is significant: it is composed not of susceptible women, but of ancient men—past the age in which the affections are active, and when the lengthen-

* Royal.

ing shadows on the dial often render the old less sensible of others' woe. And this tribute from the elders of the neighbourhood completes the circle of grief on the removal of Alcestis from all she had loved —from the cheering sunlight, the lucid streams, the green pastures, which from the palace windows had so often gladdened her eyes.

Next to Alcestis in interest is her deliverer. Without Hercules the play would, like "The Trojan Women," have been too "infected with grief." Almost from the moment of his entrance a ray of hope begins to streak the gloom, and this an Athenian spectator would feel more immediately than an English reader. The theatrical as well as the legendary Hercules, if not a comic, was at least a cheery, personage. On his right arm victory rested. He was no stranger to the Pheræans. His deeds were sung at festivals, and told by the hearth in winter. The very armour he wore was a trophy: the lion's skin he had won in fight with a king of beasts: with his club he had slain the wild boar who had gored other mighty hunters: he had wrestled with and prevailed over the giants of the earth: he was as generous and genial as he was valiant and strong: none but the proud and cruel fear him: he has ever kind words for women and children: his presence, when he is off duty, is a holiday: he may sing out of tune, yet his laugh is music to the ear.

The other *dramatis personæ* are kept, perhaps purposely, in the background. Admetus makes almost as poor a figure in this play as Jason does in the

"Medea." Self-preservation is the leading feature in his character. He loves Alcestis much, but he loves himself more. He cannot look his situation in the face. For some time he has known his wife's promise to die for him, but, until the hour of its fulfilment is striking, he is too weak to realise the import of her pledge. He lays flattering unction on his soul—perhaps somewhat in this wise: "My wife, as well as myself, must one day die: perchance the Fates may not be in haste for either of us—may even, with Apollo to friend us, renew the bond." When the inexorable missive comes for her, he is indeed deeply cast down: yet even then there is not a spark of manliness in him. Provided the Fates got one victim, they might not have been particular as to which of the twain was "nominated in the bond." But no—for him there is a saving clause in it, and he will not forego the benefit of it. He will do everything but the one thing it is in his power to do, to prove his conjugal affection. There shall be no more mirth or feasting in his dominions; the sound of tabret and harp shall never more be heard in his dwelling; black shall be his only wear; no second wife shall occupy the room of his first; had he the lute of Orpheus, he would go down to Pluto's gloomy realm, and bring her to upper air. He "doth profess too much:" he lacks the heroic spirit that dwelt in Polyxena, Macaria, and Iphigenia. Some excuse for one so weak as Admetus may perhaps be found in the view of death, or life after death, taken by the Greeks generally. Even their Elysian fields were inhabited by melancholy spectres. For with

them, to die either was to be annihilated or to pass a monotonous existence without fear but also without hope. In the one case Wordsworth's lines are applicable to them as well as to "Lucy:"—

> "No motion has she now, no force:
> She neither hears nor sees;
> Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
> With rocks and stones and trees."

They held with Claudio that

> "The weariest and most loathèd worldly life
> That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature, is a paradise
> To what we fear of death." *

Or they would say with the great Achilles in the Shades, when Ulysses congratulated him on being so honoured among dead heroes:—

> "Renowned Ulysses, think not death a theme
> Of consolation: I had rather live,
> The servile hind for hire, and eat the bread
> Of some man scantily himself sustained,
> Than sovereign empire hold o'er all the Shades." †

There may be an approach to comedy in the scene between Admetus and his father Pheres. The son asks his grey-haired sire, who brings gifts to the funeral, "if he is not ashamed of himself for cumbering the ground so long? Why did he not, an old fellow and a useless, take the place of poor Alcestis?" Pheres replies, and with some show of reason, "If you were

* "Measure for Measure." † Odyssey, xi. (Cowper.)

so fond of your late wife as you pretend to be, why did you not go when you were summoned? for remember it was not I but you on whom the citation of the Fates was originally served. For my part, I had a great regard for my daughter-in-law—she was a most exemplary young woman; but as for taking her place, I crave to be excused. I am an old man, it is true; still I am remarkably well for my years: and as for cumbering the ground, I hope to do so a little while longer. You may have been a tender husband and a faithful, and I daresay will be a good father, and not vex the two poor orphans with a stepmother — at least, just at present: but I must say your language to myself is very uncivil, not to say unfilial." The timid or selfish nature of Admetus is reflected in that of his sire: it is easy to conceive the son another Pheres, when years shall have grizzled his beard.

The reluctance of Admetus, in the final scene, to take Alcestis back again, when "brought to him from the grave," has been regarded as a comic situation; but it is by no means certain either that Euripides intended it for one, or that the spectators so interpreted it. The revived wife is a mute person, and her still disconsolate husband, who has so lately sworn never again to marry, believes for a few minutes that Hercules has indelicately, though with the best intentions, brought him a new partner. The real drift of this incident depends very much on the view of the deliverer taken commonly by an Athenian audience. Setting aside the use made of Hercules by the comic poets, we may

inquire how painters represented him. He is delineated on vases either as doing valiant deeds with his club or by his fatal arrows, or as indulging himself with the wine-cup. In one instance his weapons have been stolen from him by the God of Love, and he himself is running after a girl who has carried off his pitcher. The tragedians also do not treat him with much ceremony in their dramas: he was only a Bœotian hero, and so they took liberties with him.

This choral song, the last in the play, comes immediately before the reappearance of Hercules with the rescued Alcestis :—

"I too have been borne along
Through the airy realms of song.
Searched I have historic page,
Yet ne'er found in any age
Power that with thine can vie,
Masterless Necessity.
Thee nor Orpheus' mystic scrolls
Graved by him on Thracian pine,
Thee nor Phœbus' art controls,
Æsculapian art divine.
Of the Powers thou alone
Altar hast not, image, throne:
Sacrifices wilt thou none.—
Pains too sharp for mortal state
Lay not on me, mighty Fate.
Jove doth aye thy hests fulfil,
His to work and thine to will.
Hardest iron delved from mine
Thou canst break and bend and twine:
Harsh in purpose, heart of stone,
Mercy is to thee unknown.

Thee, Admetus, in the bands
Of her stern unyielding hands
Hath she taken; but resign
Thy life to her—it is not thine
By thy weeping to restore
Those who look on light no more.
Even the bright sons of heaven
To dimness and to death are given.
She was loved when she was here;
And in death we hold her dear:
Let not her hallowed tomb be past
As where the common dead are cast;
Let her have honour with the blest
Who dwell above; her place of rest
When the traveller passeth by,
Let him say, 'Within doth lie
She who dared for love to die.
Thou who now in bliss dost dwell,
Hail, blest soul, and speed us well!'" *

MEDEA.

To combine in the same chapter Alcestis with Medea, may appear like yoking the lamb with the lion; and so it would be, were the Colchian princess the mere fury for which she is often taken. But Euripides had too deeply studied human character not to be aware that in nature there are no monsters—none at least fit for the ends of dramatic poetry; and

* Partly translated by the late Dean Alford. Gray, in his fine ode, "Daughter of Jove, relentless power," had this choral song before him, as well as the verses of Horace which he proposed to imitate.

accordingly his Medea, though deeply wronged, is yet a woman who loved not wisely but too well. Even Lady Macbeth, though far more criminal than the heroine of this tragedy, since she had no wrongs to avenge, but sins for ambition's sake alone, is not entirely devoid of human feeling. With similar truth, both of art and observation, the Greek poet gives Medea a woman's heart even in the moments when she is meditating on her fell purpose.

Aristotle's judgment that Euripides, although he does not manage everything for the best in his plots or his representations of life, is the most pathetic of dramatic poets, is especially true of this tragedy. The hold that it has in every age retained upon spectators as well as readers, is a proof of the subject being chosen well. It was translated or adapted by Roman dramatists; it was revived in the early days of the modern theatre in Europe; it is still, wedded to immortal music, attractive; and no one who has seen the part of Medea performed by Pasta or Grisi will question its effect on an audience.

On the stage Medea appears under some disadvantage. The worse elements of her nature are there active; the better appear only now and then. She is placed in the situation described by Shakespeare:—

> "Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream:
> The genius, and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man,

Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection."
—"Julius Cæsar."

This is the condition of Medea from her first appearance on the scene to the last; the "little kingdom" of her being is rent in twain by her injuries, her threatened banishment, her helplessness among strangers and foes, her jealousy, her contempt for the mean-spirited Jason, her contempt even for herself. That she, the wise, the potent enchantress, should have been caught by his superficial beauty, and not read from the first his real character—are all elements of the insurrection in her nature. We behold only the deeply-wronged wife and mother—we do not realise her as she was a few years earlier, before the spoiler came to Colchis, a timid, trusting, and loving maiden, who set her life on one cast. Her picture, as drawn by an epic poet from whom *Virgil* found much to borrow, may put before us Medea as she was before the ship Argo—"built in the eclipse and rigged with curses dark"—passed between the blue Symplegades, and first broke the silence of the Hellespontic sea. She is thus described after her first interview with Jason:—

"And thus Medea slowly seemed to part,
Love's cares still brooding in her troubled heart;
And imaged still before her wondering eyes,
His living, breathing self appears to rise—
His very garb: and thus he spake, thus sate,
Thus, ah, too soon! he glided from the gate.
Sure ne'er her loving eyes beheld his peer,
And still his honied words are melting on her ear."

A little further on we have this description of her :—

"She said, she rose ;
Her maiden chamber's solitary floor
With trembling steps she trod : she reached the door,
Fain to her sister's neighbouring bower to haste ;
And yet the threshold hardly had she passed,
Sudden her failing feet are checked by shame,
And long she lingered there, then back she came.
Oft as desire would drive her forth again,
So oft does maiden bashfulness restrain.
Thrice she essayed to go, thrice stopped, then prone
In anguish on her couch behold her thrown." *

Such was Medea a few years only—if there be such a thing as dramatic time—before the tragedy begins. Her children are very young. Jason and herself appear to have not been long at Corinth, and so she must be regarded as still in the bloom of her youth and beauty, and not a hot-tempered lady of uncertain age. The desertion of her by her husband has accordingly the less excuse.

There is no prologue to this play, for the opening speech of the nurse—nurses on the Greek stage perform very similar functions to those of the indispensable *confidantes* of the classic drama of France—cannot be considered as such. This old servant does not go much into family history ; indeed, a barbaric woman—for such Medea is—was supposed by the pedigree-loving Greeks to have no ancestors worth mentioning. She merely lets the audience know the very critical position of affairs between Jason and his wife. The nurse

* Dean Milman s 'Translations from Valerius Flaccus.'

perceives that nothing but evil can come out of this second marriage—is sure that Medea is plotting some terrible revenge—and tells an old servant of Jason's her own terrors and her mistress's sad condition. He, on his part, brings her news. Medea must quit Corinth on that very day, and take her two sons with her; their father has consented to their banishment, and Creon, king of Corinth, cannot rest until the Colchian witch is over the border. The fears of the nurse harp on the children. She bids them go into the house, and begs Jason's servant,—

> "To the utmost, keep them by themselves,
> Nor bring them near their sorrow-frenzied mother.
> For late I saw her with the roused bull's glare
> View them as though she'd at them, and I trow
> That she'll not bate her wrath till it have swooped
> Upon some prey." *

Her just fears are confirmed by the exclamations of her mistress, speaking from within :—

> "Ah me! ah me!
> I have endured, sad woman, endured
> A burden for great laments. Cursed sons
> Of a loathed mother, die, ye and your sire,
> And let all our house wane away."

The nurse remains on the stage when the Chorus of Corinthian women enter and comment on the "wild and whirling words" they have overheard :—

* All the translations are taken from Mrs Augusta Webster's version, *poetical* as well as "literal," of the "Medea."

"I heard the voice, nay, heard the shriek
Of the hapless Colchian dame.
Is she not calmed? Old matron, speak;
For through the double portals came
A voice of wail and woe."

The nurse tells them that Medea "in no way is calmed," and again from within is heard the plaint of the unhappy and indignant princess:—

"Woe! woe!
Oh lightning from heaven, dart through my head!
For what is my gain to live any more?"

The Chorus express their sympathy, but the assurance they give that "Zeus will judge on her side" is not satisfactory to her perturbed spirit. Yielding to the wish of these sympathising friends, Medea at length comes forth from the inner chamber, and, considering her circumstances, makes a more temperate address to the Chorus than, after hearing her exclamations behind the scenes, they might have expected. She expatiates on the hardship of being a woman, and, after some remarks on the few prizes and many blanks in the lottery of marriage, she begs them to befriend her so far at least as to keep her counsel if she communicates her purpose at any time to them. This they promise to do, and tell her that, so far as regards her husband, she has good right to avenge herself on him—a sentiment that, if the Athenian ladies were permitted to applaud in the theatre, was probably greeted with much clapping of hands.

King Creon now comes on to tell Medea officially

what the old servant has already intimated to the nurse. "Thou sullen-browed woman," he says,

> "Medea, I command that from this realm
> Thou go an exile, taking thy two sons;
> And linger not, for mine is the decree,
> Nor will I enter in my house again
> Till I have driven thee past the land's last bounds."

This decision of Creon cuts up, root and branch, all Medea's projects for revenging herself on Jason, his father-in-law, and his new wife. "Now," she says,

> "My enemies crowd on all sail,
> And there is now no haven from despair."

She speaks softly to the king, even kneels to him, to turn away his wrath. But Creon is too much in dread of her devices to revoke his sentence of banishment. All he will concede is for her and her sons to depart to-morrow instead of to-day. That morrow, Medea may have said to herself, you shall never see. She has gained time for compassing her revenge.

In her next speech she lets the Chorus into her secret so far as to make them sure there will be bloody work in the palace before the sun sets. "Fool that he is!" she says; "he has left me now only one thing to find—a city of refuge, a host who will shelter me after I have done the deed, since in this day three of my foes shall perish by dagger or by drug,—

> "The father and the girl and he my husband.
> . . . . . .
> For never, by my Queen, whom I revere
> Beyond all else, and chose unto my aid,

By Hecatè, who dwells on my hearth's shrine,
Shall any wring my heart and still be glad."

A noble and appropriate chorus follows this magnificent speech of Medea's. There is room only for the first strophe, in which the women hail the good time coming:—

"The hallowed rivers backward stream
Against their founts: right crooks awry
With all things else: man's every scheme
Is treachery.
Even with gods faith finds no place.
But fame turns too: our life shall have renown:
Honour shall come to woman's race,
And envious fame no more weigh women down."

Jason now enters: he comes with the intention of remonstrating with Medea about her indiscreet demeanour towards Creon and the royal house; tells her that, but for her abominable temper and rash tongue, she might have remained on good terms with himself and all in Corinth: she has to thank herself alone for the decree of banishment. For his part, he has done all in his power to avert her doom; and even now, though she is for ever calling him "the worst of men," he will not let her go forth penniless; she shall have a handsome provision for herself and children, for, he adds,—

"Many hardships
Do wait on exile, and, though thou dost hate me,
I am not able to desire thy harm."

Unless Euripides meant to represent Jason as a fool,

as well as base and ungrateful, he could hardly have devised for him a less discreet or a more irritating speech than this. Medea now turns from red heat to white; recapitulates Jason's obligations to herself, the services she has done him, the crimes she has committed for him, and casts to the winds all his shallow, hypocritical pretences of having done his best for her and their sons. We imagine that no one will feel any pity for Jason, or deny that he richly deserved the words that, like "iron sleet of arrowy shower," fall, in this scene, upon his head,—terrible, yet just, as the fulminations hurled against Austria's Duke by Lady Constance in "King John:"—

> "Thou slave, thou wretch, thou coward,
> Thou little valiant, great in villany!
> Thou ever strong upon the stronger side!
> Thou fortune's champion—thou art perjured too,
> And sooth'st up greatness. Thou cold-blooded slave!"

Jason keeps up, like Joseph Surface, his fair speeches to the last, and this connubial dialogue closes characteristically on either side:—

> "*Jason.* Then do I call the gods to witness this,
> How I desire to serve thee and thy sons;
> Yet thou'lt not like good gifts, but wantonly
> Dost spurn thy friends, therefore shalt mourn the more
> *Medea.* Begone, for longing after thy new bride
> Seizes thee, so much tarrying from her home:
> Take her, for it is like—yea, and possessed
> By a god I will declare it—thou dost wed
> With such a wedding as thou'lt wish undone."

After a brief but very beautiful song, in which the

Chorus celebrates the power and deprecates the wrath of Venus, and deplores the exile's lot, the real *Deus ex machinâ* of this tragedy presents himself—not hovering in the air, nor gorgeous in apparel, nor a god or the son of a god, but a rather commonplace, prosy gentleman, Ægeus, king of Athens, on his way home from Delphi. Of him no more need be said than that, by promising by his gods to shelter Medea, and yield her up to none, he removes the one difficulty in her way which still perplexed her. Now at last she is armed at all points—she has an assured home and protector, time to strike down every foe, weapons they cannot guard against, and means to escape if pursued.

Her wronged children shall be the instrument of her vengeance. As to Jason himself, she has changed her purpose; he shall not have the privilege of dying, for she can make life to him more wretched than many deaths. She summons him again to her presence; pretends to regret her late hot words; will even conciliate his new wife with such gifts as none but kings' daughters can bestow. Her conditions are, that if the robe and crown be accepted by Glaucè, the children shall not quit the realm. Jason, thinking that Medea is now in her right mind, assents to both proposals, and goes out to prepare his new wife for the presents. The Chorus, who are in the secret, apprise the audience that these gauds are far deadlier than were Bellerophon's letters:—

"By the grace and the perfect gleaming won,
She will place the gold-wrought crown on her head;

She will robe herself in the robe: and anon
She will deck her a bride among the dead."

The gifts are envenomed. Glaucè and Creon, wrapt in a sheet of phosphoric flame, expire in torments. Jason is a widowed bridegroom; all Corinth is aroused to take vengeance on the barbaric sorceress. Surely this must be the end of the tragedy. No; "bad begins, but worse remains behind." One more blow remains to be dealt. Jason is wifeless, he shall be childless too, before Medea speeds in her dragon-borne car—the chariot of the Sun, her grandsire—to hospitable Athens.

Never, perhaps, has a more terrible scene been exhibited on any stage than this final one of Medea. To it may be applied the words spoken of another spectacle of "woe and wonder:"—

"This quarry cries on havock! O, proud death!
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes, at a shot,
So bloodily hast struck."
—"Hamlet."

Jason, who has been witnessing the charred remains of Glaucè and Creon, rushes on the stage to arrest their murderess. He cries frantically:—

"Hath she gone away in flight?
For now must she or hide beneath the earth,
Or lift herself with wings into wide air,
Not to pay forfeit to the royal house."

But "one woe doth tread upon another's heels." "Seeks she to kill me too?" he demands of the Chorus. "Nay," they reply, "you know not the worst:"—

"The boys have perished by their mother's hand:
Open these gates, thou'lt see thy murdered sons.
Jason. Undo the bolt on the instant, servants there;
Loose the clamps, that I may see my grief and bane,
May see them dead, and guerdon her with death."

He sees them dead, indeed, but may "not kiss the dear lips of his boys;" "may not touch his children's soft flesh." Medea hovers over the palace, taunts him with her wrongs, mocks at his new-born love for the children he had consented to banish, and triumphs alike over her living and her dead foes:—

"'Twas not for thee, having spurned my love,
To lead a merry life, flouting at me,
Nor for the princess; neither was it his
Who gave her thee to wed, Creon, unscathed
To cast me out of his realm. And now,
If it so like thee, call me lioness,
And Scylla, dweller on Tursenian plains;
For as right bade me, have I clutched thy heart."

The story of Medea, unconnected as it is with any workings of destiny or fatal necessity—such as humbled the pride of Theban and Argive Houses—has been taxed with a want of proper tragical grandeur, as if a picture of human passion were less fit for the drama than one of the strife between Fate and Free-will.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO IPHIGENIAS.

"I was cut off from hope in that sad place,
Which yet to name my spirit loathes and fears:
My father held his hand upon his face;
I, blinded with my tears,
Still strove to speak: my voice was thick with sighs,
As in a dream. Dimly I could descry
The stern black-bearded kings with wolfish eyes
Waiting to see me die."
—TENNYSON: "A Dream of Fair Women."

ABOUT the fate of Iphigenia many stories were current in Greece, and the version of it adopted by Euripides is one among several instances of the freedom which he permitted himself in dealing with old legends. Æschylus in his "Agamemnon" and Sophocles in his "Electra" make her to have been really sacrificed at Aulis. Euripides chose a milder and perhaps later form of the story; and if we have the conclusion of the drama as he wrote it, Diana, at the last moment, rescues the maiden, and substitutes in her place on the altar—a fawn. To this change his own humane disposition may have led him, although he had in earlier

plays not scrupled to immolate Polyxena and Macaria. Perhaps in the case of Iphigenia consistency required of him to save her, since in the play, of which the scene is laid at Tauri, the princess is alive twenty years after her appearance at Aulis. Pausanias, as diligent a collector of legendary lore as Sir Walter Scott himself, says that a virgin was offered up at Aulis to appease the wrath of the divine huntress, and that her name was Iphigenia. This victim, however, was not a daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, but of Theseus and Helen, whom her mother, through fear of Menelaus, did not dare to own. In the Iliad, that common source of the stage-poets when they dealt with the tale of Troy, nothing is said about substitute or sacrifice, nor about Iphigenia's ministering to Diana at Tauri. On the contrary,* the Homeric Iphianassa —for that is her epic name—is safe and well with her mother and sisters at Argos, and ten years after her supposed death or escape is offered by Agamemnon as a bride to Achilles.

The "Iphigenia in Aulis," in its relation to the Grecian world, possessed, we may fairly surmise, universal interest. For an audience composed, as that in the Dionysiac theatre was, of Athenians, allies, and strangers, there were associations with the first

* "In his house
He hath three daughters: thou may'st home conduct
To Pthia her whom thou shalt most approve.
Chrysothemis shall be thy bride, or else
Laodice, or, if she please thee more,
Iphianassa."

—Iliad, ix. (Cowper.)

general armament of the Greeks against foreigners, with which a modern reader can but imperfectly sympathise. Priam, Paris, Hector, Agamemnon, Achilles, Helen, and Iphigenia had indeed, centuries before, vanished into the shadow-land of Hades, and the quiet sheep fed or the tortoise crawled over the mounds where Troy once stood. Yet if the city built by Gods now excited neither wrath nor dread in Greece, Persia and the great King, though no longer objects of alarm, were not beyond the limits of Hellenic anxiety or vigilance, and were still able to vex Athens by their "mines of Ophir," as once they had made her desolate by their Median archers and the swarthy chivalry of Susa. To Greece and the islands, the dwellers beyond Mount Taurus represented the ancient foe whom it had taken their ancestors ten years to vanquish; and scenic reminiscences of their first conflict with an eastern adversary were still welcome to the third and fourth generation of spectators, whose sires had fought beside Miltiades and Cimon.*

The opening scene of the "Iphigenia in Aulis" has, for picturesqueness, rarely if ever been surpassed. The centre of the stage is occupied by the tent of Agamemnon: supposing ourselves among the audience, we see on the left hand of it the white tents and beyond them the black ships of the Achæans; on the right, the road to the open country by which Iphigenia and her

* When Agesilaus, king of Sparta, was about to pass into Asia, as commander of the Greek army, he offered sacrifice to Diana at Aulis, so lively an impression still remained of the rash vow of "the king of men."

mother Clytemnestra will soon arrive. The time is night, the "brave o'erhanging firmament" is studded with stars. The only sounds audible are the tramp of sentinels, and the challenge of the watch: the camp is wrapt in deep slumber:—

> "Not the sound
> Of birds is heard, nor of the sea; the winds
> Are hushed in silence."

"The king of men" is much agitated by some secret grief. By the light of a "blazing lamp" he is writing a letter:—

> "The writing he does blot; then seal,
> And open it again; then on the floor
> Casts it in grief: the warm tear from his eyes
> Fast flowing, in his thoughts distracted near,
> Even, it may seem, to madness."

The cause for the perturbation of his spirit is this: the Grecian fleet has been detained at Aulis by thwarting winds, and Calchas, the seer, has declared that Agamemnon's daughter must be sacrificed to Diana, irate with him because he has shot, while hunting, one of her sacred deer. Unwittingly the Grecian commander has, in order to conciliate her, vowed that he will offer to her the most beautiful creature that the year of his child's birth has produced. He has been persuaded by his brother Menelaus to summon Iphigenia to Aulis, on the pretext of giving her in marriage to Achilles. He has sent a letter to Argos, directing Clytemnestra to bring the maiden to the camp without delay. Soon, however, the father recoils from this deceit,

and he prepares a second letter, annulling the former one, and enjoining his wife to remain at home. This he commits to the hands of an old servant of Clytemnestra's, with injunctions to make all speed with it to Argos; but just as the messenger is passing the borders of the camp, he is seized by Menelaus, who breaks the seal, reads the missive, and hurries to upbraid his brother with treachery to himself and the general cause of Hellas. A sharp debate ensues between the brothers—one twitting the other with bad faith; the other taxing the husband of Helen with want of proper feeling for his niece and himself, and chiding him for taking such pains to get back that worthless runaway, his wife. "If I," he says,

> "Before ill judging, have with sobered thought
> My purpose changed, must I be therefore judged
> Reft of my sense? Thou rather, who hast lost
> A wife that brings thee shame, yet dost with warmth
> Wish to regain her, may the favouring Gods
> Grant thee such luck. But I will not slay
> My children.
> My nights, my days, would pass away in tears,
> Did I with outrage and injustice wrong
> Those who derive their life from me."

The brothers part in high dudgeon, Agamemnon remaining on the stage; and to him a messenger enters, bearing the unwelcome tidings that Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, and the infant Orestes, will soon make glad his eyes, after their long separation. They are close to the camp, though they have not yet entered it, for—

"Wearied with this length of way, beside
A beauteous-flowing fountain they repose,
Themselves refreshing, and their steeds unyoked
Crop the fresh herbage of the verdant mead."

"Thou hast my thanks—go in," says the now utterly wretched father to the messenger, and then tells in soliloquy his woes to the audience. He is caught in inextricable toils. Shall he cause the assembled host to rise and mutiny, or shall he keep his rash vow, and sacrifice his darling to the irate goddess—"what ruin hath the son of Priam brought on me and my house!"

It is now early morning, and the camp is astir, and a murmur, gradually getting louder, is heard. The chieftains and the soldiers are greeting the queen of Argos and Mycenæ, her fair daughter, and her infant son. But before they enter, Menelaus has hurried back, and is reconciled to his royal brother. The younger king tells his liege lord that speedy repentance has followed on the heels of his late hasty passion. He has been moved by the tears of the distracted father: he yields to the arguments used by him:—

"When from thine eye I saw thee drop the tear,
I pitied thee and wept myself: what I said then
I now unsay, no more unkind to thee.
Now feel I as thou feelest—nay, exhort thee
To spare thy child; for what hath she to do,
Thy virgin daughter, with my erring wife?
Break up the army, let the troops depart.
Within this breast there beats a loving heart.
Love or ambition shall not us divide,
Though they part brethren oft."

A second choral song follows this reconciliation scene; and then the chariot that has brought Clytemnestra and her young children appears on the right hand of the royal tent. She is welcomed by the Chorus, and assisted by them to alight. In Clytemnestra, Euripides shows how delicately he can delineate female characters, and how happily he has seized the opportunity for exhibiting the Lady Macbeth or Lucrezia Borgia of the Greek stage as a loving wife and mother. The seeds of evil passions were dormant in her nature, but until she was deeply wronged they bore not fruit. Clytemnestra in this play is a fond mother, a trusting wife, a very woman, even shy, unpretending, unversed in courts or camps. To the Chorus, after acknowledging their "courtesy and gentleness of speech," she says:—

"I hope that I am come
To happy nuptials, leading her a bride.
But from the chariot take the dowry-gifts,
Brought with me for the virgin: to the house
Bear them with careful hands. My daughter, leave
The chariot now, and place upon the ground
Thy delicate foot. Kind women, in your arms
Receive her—she is tender: prithee too,
Lend me a hand, that I may leave this seat
In seemly fashion. Some stand by the yoke,
Fronting the horses; they are quick of eye,
And hard to rule when startled. Now receive
This child, an infant still. Dost sleep, my boy?
The rolling of the car hath wearied thee:
Yet wake to see thy sister made a bride;
A noble youth, the bridegroom, Thetis' son,
And he will wed into a noble house."

She enters without pomp or circumstance, with only an attendant or two. Knowing his name, she displays no further curiosity about the supposed bridegroom: whatever her husband has designed must, she thinks, be good. She, a half-divine princess of the race of Tantalus, the sister of Helen and of the great Twin-Brethren, the consort of "the king of men," is nevertheless an uninstructed Grecian housewife. She knows nothing of the genealogy of Achilles, at least on the father's side. She has never heard of the Myrmidons: she knows not where Pthia may be: she asks what mortal or what goddess became the wife of Peleus; and when told that she is the sea-nymph Thetis, who but for a warning oracle would have been the spouse of Jupiter, she wonders where the rites of Hymen were celebrated, on firm land or in some ocean cave. The childlike amazement and delight of Iphigenia also are drawn by a master's hand. Not Thecla, when first entering Wallenstein's palace and seeing the royal state by which her father was surrounded; not Miranda, gazing for the first time upon "the brave new world,"* are more delicate creations of poetic fancy than Iphigenia.

Bearing in mind what the representation of strong emotions can be on the modern stage, where the face and limbs of the actors are free to exhibit the varying moods of a tragic character, it is most difficult, or

* "Oh wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! Oh, brave new world
That has such people in it!"
—"Tempest," act v. sc. 1.

rather impossible, to understand how passion or pathos could be interpreted by men so encumbered as the actors were on the ancient stage by their masks, their high boots, and their cumbersome robes. And as the scene in which Agamemnon receives the newly-arrived Clytemnestra and his daughter is a mixed one,—joy simulated, fear and grief suppressed, on *his* part—happiness in the unlooked-for meeting with a husband and father, and hope for the approaching nuptials, on *theirs*,—it is impossible to conceive how it can have been adequately represented. The painter who drew Agamemnon at Diana's altar veiling his face that he might not look on his victim, had at least an opportunity for conveying the presence of grief "too deep for tears." But how could the father's emotions in this scene have been imparted to an audience? The Greek actor differed little from a statue except in the possession of voice, and in a certain, though a limited, range of expressive gesture. That these imperfect means, as they appear to us, sufficed for an intelligent and susceptible audience, there is no reason to doubt; and we must content ourselves with the assurance that the performer and the mechanist supplied all that was then needed for the full expression of terror and pity.

The character of Achilles is delineated with great skill and felicity. The hero of the Iliad is a most dramatic portraiture of one who has, in spite of his pride and wilfulness, many compensating virtues. If his passions are strong, so are his affections: if he is im-

placable to mailed foes, he is generous and even tender to weeping Priam: he knows that he bears a doomed life if he tarries on Trojan ground, yet though highly provoked by Agamemnon, he abides constant to the oath he had taken as one of the suitors of Helen. But the Achilles of the "Iphigenia," although a peerless soldier, the Paladin of the Achæan host—a Greek Bayard, "sans peur et sans reproche"—is a modest, nay, even a shy stripling, blushing like a girl when he comes suddenly into the presence of his destined bride and her mother: not easily moved, yet perplexed and indignant in the extreme when he discovers that his name has been used as a lure, and full of pity for, and prompt to aid, the unhappy victims of a cruel and unnatural plot. Achilles, indeed, in the hands of Euripides, is an anticipation of the Knight in the Canterbury Tales:—

> "And though that he was worthy, he was wys:
> And of his port as meke as is a mayde:
> He never yit no vilonye ne sayde,
> In al his lyf unto no manner wight:
> He was a verry perfit gentil knight."

No chance of extricating himself from the dreadful consequences of his summons to Clytemnestra remains for Agamemnon, except the very slender one of persuading her to return alone to Argos. This she stoutly, and, in her ignorance of his secret motive, reasonably refuses to do. A sharp connubial encounter ensues, in which Agamemnon does not get the best of it. A

very short extract only can be afforded to their controversy. After asking sundry pertinent questions about the young bridegroom and the marriage ceremony—in which the speakers are at cross-purposes, Clytemnestra meaning the wedding, while Agamemnon's replies covertly allude to the sacrifice—he astonishes her by a most unexpected demand upon her obedience! "Obey you!" she exclaims; "you have long trained me to do so, but in what am I now to show my obedience?"

"*Agam.* To Argos go, thy charge the virgins there.
Clyt. And leave my daughter? Who shall raise the torch?
Agam. The light to deck the nuptials I will hold.
Clyt. Custom forbids; nor wouldst thou deem it seemly.
Agam. Nor decent that thou mix with banded troops.
Clyt. But decent that the mother give the daughter.
Agam. Let me persuade thee.
Clyt. By the potent Queen,
Goddess of Argos, no. Of things abroad
Take thou the charge: within the house my care
Shall deck the virgin's nuptials, as is meet."

Agamemnon, now at his wits' end, says he will go and consult Calchas, and hear from him whether anything can be done to set him right with Diana.

Matters are hurrying to a crisis. Achilles enters, after the choral song has ceased, thinking to find Agamemnon, and then to inform him that the Myrmidons are on the very edge of mutiny, and that he cannot hold them in much longer. He says:—

"With impatient instance oft
They urge me: 'Why, Achilles, stay we here?
What tedious length of time is yet to pass,
To Ilium ere we sail? Wouldst thou do aught,
Do it, or lead us home: nor here await
The sons of Atreus and their long delays.'"

Instead of his commander-in-chief he finds Clytemnestra, who greatly scandalises him by offering her hand to her destined son-in-law. She, on her part, is surprised at a modesty so uncommon in young men. The old slave, the same whom Menelaus so roughly handles at the opening of the drama, now comes forward and unfolds the mystery. Clytemnestra sues to the captain of the Myrmidons for protection against the cruel "black-bearded kings:" he is highly incensed at having been made a cat's-paw of by Agamemnon, Calchas the seer, and the crafty Ulysses, and promises to do all in his power to rescue Iphigenia from her fearful doom, even at any risk to himself from his impatient soldiers.

Agamemnon now reappears. Ignorant that his wife is now furnished with all the facts he had withheld, he is greatly discomfited by her upbraiding him with his weak and wicked consent to the sacrifice of Iphigenia. After threatening him with her vengeance—a threat she some years later fulfilled—she descends to entreaties, and prays him to spare their child. And now comes the most affecting scene of the tragedy. Iphigenia, aware that she is not the destined bride but the chosen victim, implores her father to change his purpose; and the more to prevail with him, brings in her arms her

infant brother, Orestes, to move him to spare her. Agamemnon, however, declares, he is so compromised with the Greeks that he cannot recede. His own life will be in danger from the infuriated host, if he any longer withholds the appointed victim. Again Achilles rushes on with the news that his soldiers have sworn to kill him, if for the sake of a young maiden he any longer detains them at Aulis. And now the daughter of a line of heroes shows herself heroic. She will be the victim whom the goddess demands. Troy shall fall: Greece shall triumph: in place of marriage and happy years, she will die for the common weal. Her father shall be glorious to all ages: she will be content with the renown of saving Hellas. With much compunction, and with some hesitation on the part of the chivalrous Achilles, all now accept the stern necessity. In solemn procession, and with a funeral chant sung by the victim and the Chorus, she goes to the altar of Diana. The end of the tragedy, as we have it, is probably spurious, so far as the substitution of the fawn is concerned. The real conclusion seems to have been the appearance of the goddess over the tent of Agamemnon, to inform the weeping mother that her daughter is not dead, but borne away to a remote land, the Tauric Chersonese. They are parted for ever, yet there may be consolation in knowing Iphigenia has not descended to the gloomy Hades, "the bourne from which no traveller returns."

Mr Paley remarks, with his unfailing insight into the pith and marrow of the Grecian drama, that "Aristotle cites the character of Iphigenia at Aulis as an

example of want of consistency or uniformity; since she first supplicates for life, and afterwards consents to die. It is difficult to attribute much weight to the criticism, though it comes with the sanction of a great name. The part of Iphigenia throughout appears singularly natural. Her first impulse is to live; but when she clearly perceives how much depends on her voluntary death, and how Achilles, her champion, is compromised by his dangerous resolve to save her—lastly, how the Greeks are bent on the expedition, from motives of national honour—she yields herself up a willing victim. It would be quite as reasonable to object to Menelaus's sudden change of purpose, from demanding the death of the maid, to the refusing to consent to it."

IPHIGENIA AT TAURI.

Twenty years have passed since the concluding scene of "Iphigenia in Aulis" before the opening of this drama. Ten years were spent in the siege of Troy, another ten in the return of the surviving heroes to their homes. From the moment when the young daughter of Agamemnon is borne away from the altar at Aulis, she has been devoted to the service of Diana at Tauri—a goddess who, like the ferocious deities of the Mexicans, delighted in the savour of human blood. From that moment, also, Iphigenia has remained ignorant of the great events that have taken place since her rescue. She knows not that Troy has fallen; that her father has been murdered and avenged;

that her brother Orestes and her sister Electra yet live, but under the ban of gods and men; or that Helen, the "direful spring" of so many woes to Greece, is once more queen at Sparta. Little chance, indeed, was there of her getting news of her country or kindred in the inhospitable country to which she had been brought. The land where Tauri * stood was shunned by all Greeks, for the welcome awaiting them there was death on the altar of the goddess, to whom men of their race were the most acceptable of victims.

But the end of her long exile and the hour assigned for her restoration to home and kindred were at hand. A Greek vessel arrives at this remote and barbarous region; and two strangers, immediately after the priestess of Diana has spoken a kind of prologue, come upon the stage, and cautiously, as persons afraid of being seen, survey the temple. Though they have had foul weather and rough seas, they are not shipwrecked, but have come with a special object to this perilous land. That object is apparently of the most desperate kind, for the strangers are not only Greeks, but have come, in obedience to an oracle, to carry off and transport to Attica the tutelary goddess of Tauri. In the prologue the audience is prepared to recognise in the two persons on the stage Orestes and his friend Pylades; for Iphigenia relates a dream she has had on the previous night, but which she misinterprets. She believes it to mean that Orestes, whom she had left an infant at Aulis, is dead, and proposes to offer

* The action of the play is fixed at the now historic Balaclava, in the Crimea.

libations to his shade. Orestes and his friend, having satisfied themselves that this is the temple whence the image, by force or fraud, must be taken away, retire and give place to the Chorus, not indeed without some misgivings on the part of Orestes as to the possibility of executing their enjoined task. "The walls are high," he says—"the doors are barred with brass; even if we can climb the one and force the other, how shall we escape the watchful eyes of those who guard the shrine or dwell in the city? If detected, we shall be put to death:—

> "Shall we, then, ere we die, by flight regain
> The ship, in which we hither ploughed the sea?"

"Of flight we must not think," rejoins Pylades; "the god's command must be obeyed. But we have seen enough of the temple for the present; and now let us retire to some cave where

> "We may lie concealed
> At distance from our ship, lest some, whose eyes
> May note it, bear the tidings to the king,
> And we be seized by force."

What Pylades had dreaded happens. The Chorus, as soon as their song, in which Iphigenia takes a part, is ended, say to her,—

> "Leaving the sea-washed shore an herdsman comes,
> Speeding with some fresh tidings."

The herdsman's report of what he has seen is most strange and exciting to the hearers of it. He opens

it with apprising the priestess that she must get all things ready for a sacrifice, for

"Two youths, swift rowing 'twixt the dashing rocks
Of our wild sea, are landed on the beach,
A grateful offering at Diana's shrine.

"At first one of my comrades took them, as they sat in the cavern, for two deities; but another said, they are wrecked mariners: and he was in the right, as soon it proved; for one of the twain was suddenly seized with madness, while the other soothed him in his frenzy,—

"Wiped off the foam, took of his person care,
And spread his fine robe over him.

"The mad one had assailed our herds, mistaking them, it seems, for certain Furies that hunt him; whereupon we, seeing the havoc he was making, blew our horns, called the neighbours to our aid, and at last, after a desperate resistance from these strange visitors, we captured them both,—

"And bore them to the monarch of this land:
He viewed them, and without delay to thee
Sent them, devoted to the cleansing vase
And to the altar."

Hitherto the hand of Iphigenia is unspotted by the blood of human victims. The prisoners are the first Greeks who have landed on this fatal coast. She is still under the influence of her dream. Her conviction that Orestes is dead, her remembrance of the wrong done to her at Aulis, combine to harden her

against the prisoners before they are presented to her. When, however, she has seen and interrogated them as to their nation and whence they come, her mood changes. Her ignorance of what has taken place since she left Argos is now dispersed. Not only does she learn that the Greeks have taken Troy and returned to their homes, but also that Orestes is living. He evades, indeed, her questions as to himself; he will not disclose his name and parentage, and is unaware that his sister stands before him. "Argives both are ye?" she says, "then one of you shall be spared, and he shall take a letter from me to my brother." Then follows the celebrated contest between the pair of friends as to which of them shall do her commission. The deeply affecting character of this scene was felt in all lands where the tragedy was represented. "What shouts, what excitement," says Lælius, "pervaded the theatre at the representation of my friend Pacuvius's new play, when the contest took place between Orestes and Pylades, each claiming the privilege of dying for the other!"* Then comes the recognition between the long-parted brother and sister. Iphigenia will not trust to mere oral communication. She will write as well as give a verbal message. She reads the letter to the captives. She takes this precaution for two reasons:—

> "If thou preserve
> This letter, *that*, though silent, will declare
> My purport; if it perish in the sea,
> Saving thyself my words too shalt thou save."

* Cicero on Friendship, c. 7.

Brother and sister are now made manifest to each other. The priestess is the long-lost Iphigenia: the stranger is the brother whom she had held an infant in her arms, and whom she was mourning as dead. The method by which Æschylus and Sophocles bring about the discovery is consistent with their sublimer genius; that which Euripides adopts is equally consonant with his more human temperament, no less than with his views of dramatic art.

The deliverance of the friends and the priestess is still hard to accomplish; they are begirt with peril. Iphigenia knows too well the religious rigour of the Taurian king. Thoas is a devout worshipper of Diana; is an inexorable foe to Greeks. His subjects and his guards are equally hostile towards strangers and loyal to their goddess. If they cannot escape, the intruders will be immolated, and the priestess be a third victim on the blood-stained altar. And now Iphigenia proves that she is Greek to the core. She can plot craftily: she will even hazard the wrath of a deity by a timely fraud. King Thoas, little more than a simple country gentleman, dividing his time between field-sports and ceremonies sacred or civil, is no match for three wily Greeks. "The statue of Diana," she tells him, "must be taken down to the beach and purified by the sea; the two strangers, before they are sacrificed, must undergo lustration." "Take the caitiffs by all means," he says, "to the shore. A guard must attend you, for they are stalwart knaves; one of them has murdered his mother, and the other prompted and abetted him in that foul

crime." For a while the soldiers are persuaded to leave Iphigenia alone with the strangers, while she performs the necessary rites. At length her delay rouses their suspicion, and they discover that, so far from rendering the statue and the prisoners meet for the sacrifice, they are plotting not only flight, but theft. One of them brings the intelligence to Thoas :—

> "At length we all resolved
> To go, though not permitted, where they were.
> There we beheld the Grecian bark with oars
> Well furnished, winged for flight ; and at their seats
> Grasping their oars were fifty rowers : free
> From chains beside the stern the two youths stood.
> . . . . . Debate
> Now rose : What mean you, sailing o'er the seas,
> The statue and the priestess from the land
> By stealth conveying ? Whence art thou, and who,
> That bear'st her, like a purchased slave, away ?
> He said, I am her brother, be of this
> Informed, Orestes, son of Agamemnon ;
> My sister, so long lost, I bear away,
> Recovered here."

Orestes and his crew release Iphigenia from the guards, and drive them up the rocks,—

> "With dreadful marks
> Disfigured and bloody bruises : from the heights
> We hurled at them fragments of rock : but vainly.
> The bowmen with their arrows drove us thence."

The sea, however, swept back the galley to the beach, and not even the fifty rowers can propel it out of harbour.

"Haste then, O king,
Take chains and gyves with thee; for if the flood
Subside not to a calm, there is no hope
Of safety for the strangers."

Thoas needs no prompter. He calls to the people of Tauri to avenge this insult to their goddess:—

"Harness your steeds at once: will you not fly
Along the shore, to seize whate'er this ship
Of Greece casts forth, and, for your goddess roused,
Hunt down these impious men? Will you not launch
Instant your swift-oared barks by seas, on land
To catch them, from the rugged rock to hurl
Their bodies, or impale them on the stake?"

To the Chorus he hints that, inasmuch as they have known all along and concealed the dark designs of the recreant priestess and her two confederates in this sacrilegious crime, he will, at more leisure, "devise brave punishments" for them.

The capture of the fugitives is unavoidable; and if they are once more in his grasp, the pious and wrathful king will leave no member of Agamemnon's family alive except the sad and solitary Electra. Euripides now settles the matter by his usual device, an intervening deity. Pallas Athene appears above the temple of Diana, and apprises Thoas that it is her pleasure that both the priestess and the image shall be carried to Greece by Orestes, where the worship of the Taurian Artemis, purged of its sanguinary rites, shall be established at Halæ and Brauron in Attica. Thoas is satisfied. Agamemnon's children are free to depart; and

Pylades, as a reward for his long-enduring friendship, is to marry Electra.

Should this drama, in virtue of its happy conclusion, be accounted, along with the "Alcestis" and the "Helen" of Euripides, a tragi-comedy? In one respect the "Iphigenia at Tauri" stands apart from these plays. In the former, there is something approaching to the comic in the person of Hercules; in the latter, something even risible in the garb of Menelaus, and in his conversation with the old woman who is hall-porter in the palace of Theoclymenus. The drama, however, that has now been examined, is from its beginning to its end full of action, excitement, suspense, dread, and uncertainty. The doom of a race, as well as individuals, is at stake; and the prospect of the principal characters is gloomy in the extreme, until their rescue by a deity delivers them from further suffering. Both "Iphigenias" derive much of their attractions for all times and ages from the deeply domestic tenor of the story. "How many 'Iphigenias' have been written!" said Goethe. "Yet they are all different, for each writer manages the subject after his own fashion."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BACCHANALS.

"Over wide streams and mountains great we went,
And, save when Bacchus kept his ivy-tent,
Onward the tiger and the leopard pants
With Asian elephants:
We follow Bacchus! Bacchus on the wing,
A-conquering!
Bacchus, young Bacchus! good or ill betide,
We dance before him thorough kingdoms wide:
Come hither, lady fair, and joined be
To our wild minstrelsy."

—KEATS: "Endymion."

THIS is the only extant Greek tragedy connected with the wanderings and worship of the wine-god, at whose festivals the Greek theatres were open, and from song and dance in whose honour the drama of Greece derived its origin. The subject, when Euripides took it up, was not new to the stage. Among the dramas ascribed to Thespis, one was entitled "Pentheus;" and another by him, "The Bachelors," may have treated of Lycurgus, also a vehement opposer of Bacchic rites. Æschylus exhibited two trilogies, in which Pentheus and Lycurgus were the principal characters. The serene

muse of Sophocles appears to have avoided such exciting themes.

"The Bacchanals" was not brought out in the lifetime of Euripides. It was exhibited by a younger man of the same name, his son or his nephew. If it were, as it is supposed to have been, the work of one far advanced in years, it displays no trace of declining powers, and, in that respect, is on a par with the Sophoclean "Œdipus at Colonos." From its scenes and subject it was probably composed after Euripides had quitted Athens; and there may have been reasons for his writing this tragedy at Pella, as a compliment to his host and patron Archelaus. The play, indeed, was well suited to the genius of the land, and the people before whom it was represented. Northern Greece, Macedonia, and the adjoining districts, were devout worshippers of Bacchus, both in faith and practice. Alexander's "captains and colonels and knights at arms" astonished the more sober Asiatics by their capacity for deep potations. The women of Thrace, Thessaly, and Macedonia, when the purple vintage was garnered, and the vats overflowed with red juice, celebrated harvest-home by putting on ivy-chaplets and tunics made of lion or deer skins, by brandishing the thyrsus, and by wild and violent dances. Olympias, the mother of Alexander, was a Bacchantè, and at certain seasons of the year whirled around the altars of the god, with snakes depending from her girdle and her hair. In this picturesque, if rather savage dress, she is said to have won the heart of King Philip, himself a most loyal subject of the jovial deity.

The poet of "The Bacchanals," now a voluntary exile at Pella, seems to have reinvigorated himself under a new sky, and to exult in his freedom. He had gone from a land tamed and domesticated by the hand of man, to a land in which nature was still imperfectly subdued. In the place of vineyards, oliveyards, and gardens, forests and mountains greeted his eyes. Broad rivers were in the room of the narrow and uncertain streams that watered Attica. The snows on Mount Parnes disappeared when the sun rode in Cancer; but they never departed from the sides and summits of Ossa and Olympus. There is a Salvator-like grandeur in the scenery described in "The Bacchanals." The action of the play lies indeed in Bœotia; but, instead of loamy fields and sluggish rivers, we are placed among rocks where the eagle builds her eyrie, or among forests tenanted by the wolf and bear.

The religious elements in "The Bacchanals" are worth noticing, since they differ widely from those commonly found in other plays of its author. The presiding god is a terrible as well as a powerful being. He admits of no half-service; he cannot abide sceptics; he makes short work with opponents. All such free and easy dealing with the gods as are met with in "The Phrenzy of Hercules" or the "Electra" disappears. Perhaps the Macedonians were not sufficiently civilised to relish tampering with old beliefs. There may also have been a change in the feelings of the aged poet himself. He may have said to himself, "What has it profited me to have so long striven to make others see

more clearly? Would it not have been wiser to do as my friend Sophocles has ever done, and view both gods and social relations with the eyes of the vulgar?" Unimpaired as his mental force must have been for him to write such a tragedy as "The Bacchanals," his bodily strength may have been touched by years. We are not told whether either of his wives accompanied him to Pella; if neither of them were with him, there was the less occasion for philosophy. Whatever the cause may have been, there is more faith than doubt or speculation to be found in this tragedy.

The action of "The Bacchanals" is laid in a remote age, and there is an Oriental quite as much as a Greek savour in the poetry. Cadmus, who has ceded the Theban sceptre to his grandson Pentheus, was by birth a Phœnician, not a Bœotian. He lived before the Greek Argo had rushed through the blue Symplegades to the Colchian strand. He is beyond recorded time; he "antiquates" common "antiquity." His intercourse with the gods has been intimate but not happy. Jupiter had taken a fancy to his sister Europa, and to one of his daughters—and by her, Semele, he is, though long unaware of it, grandfather to Bacchus.

When the play opens, all Thebes—its male population, at least—is perplexed in the extreme. The women are all gone mad: they are off to the mountains, and many of them have taken their children with them; for their customary suits they have donned fawn-skins; they brandish poles wreathed with ivy: shouting and singing, dancing and leaping, they scour the plains,

climb the hills, and scare the fox and the wild cat from their holes. From this sudden mania neither age nor rank is free: sober housewives are themselves doing what a few days before they would have blushed to see done by others. Even the Queen Agavè and her attendant ladies are swept into the vortex, and prance like so many peasant girls at a wake.

The cause of this strange and unseemly revel is the appearance in Bœotia of a young man of handsome presence, with flowing locks like grape-bunches, and a delicate yet somewhat ruddy visage. His errand to Thebes is a strange one. He pretends to be a native of that city; he points to a charred mound of earth as his mother's grave, and, wondrous to relate, since he first visited it, the blackened turf is covered and canopied over with a luxuriant vine! He began by claiming near kinship with the royal house of Cadmus; and because the female members scoffed at his pretensions, he drives them insane. His retinue are as strange as his errand. It is composed of dark-eyed swarthy women, such as might be seen in the streets of Tyre and Sidon celebrating the feast of Astartè with dance and song. The dull, yet by no means sober, Bœotians cannot tell what to make of these eccentric visitors. Some think that the magistrates—the Bœotarchs—should clap them into the town jail: but how to catch, and, when caught, how to keep, these wild damsels, is the difficulty; for they are as slippery to handle as the eels in Lake Copaïs, and as fierce as the lynxes that swarm on Mount Cithæron. Never had Thebes, since Amphion had drawn the stones of

its walls together by his minstrelsy, been in such perturbation.

Who the young stranger with grape-bunch locks is, the audience are told by himself in the prologue. He is what he pretends to be, the son of Jupiter and Semele. He has travelled far before he came to Thebes to establish his rites and claim his kindred. "I have left," he says,

> "The golden Lydian shores,
> The Phrygian and the Persian sun-seared plains,
> And Bactria's walls; the Medes' wild wintry land
> Have passed, and Araby the blest; and all
> Of Asia that along the salt-sea coast
> Lifts up her high-towered cities, where the Greeks,
> With the Barbarians mingled, dwell in peace." *

Hitherto, wherever I have come, mankind has acknowledged me a god: the first opposition I have met with is in this, the first Hellenic town I have entered:—

> "But here, where least beseemed, my mother's sisters
> Vowed Dionysus was no son of Jove;
> That Semelè, by mortal paramour won,
> Belied great Jove as author of her sin;
> 'Twas but old Cadmus' craft: hence Jove in wrath
> Struck dead the bold usurper of his bed."

In requital for such usage, he has goaded all the women of Thebes into frenzy:—

> "There's not a woman of old Cadmus' race
> But I have maddened from her quiet house;

* The translated passages are all taken from Dean Milman's version of this drama.

Unseemly mingled with the sons of Thebes,
On the roofless rocks 'neath the pale pines they sit."

Cadmus the king, and Tiresias the seer, well knowing that Bacchus is really what he assumes to be—after a little hesitation about their novel attire in fawn-skins, their ivy-crown, and thyrsus, determine to join the Bacchanal rout; and Tiresias, as the king's ghostly confessor, preaches to him the following doctrine, sound indeed in itself, but uncommon in Euripidean drama:—

"No wile, no paltering with the deities.
The ancestral faith, coeval with our race,
No subtle reasoning, if it soar aloft,
Even to the height of wisdom, can o'erthrow."

Their purpose, however, to speed at once to the mountains, is stayed by the entrance of Pentheus, who has been absent from home, but has come back, in hot haste, on hearing of these strange and evil doings in his city. He will crush, he will stamp out, this pestilent new religion—a religion having in it quite as much of Venus as of Bacchus. Gyves and the prison-house shall be the portion of these wild women; and as for that wizard from the land of Lydia,—

"If I catch him 'neath this roof, I'll silence
The beatings of his thyrsus, stay his locks'
Wild tossing, from his body severing his head."

As for his grandsire, and the "blind prophet" his companion, he cannot marvel enough at their folly; nay, wroth as he is, he can scarcely help laughing at their

fawn-skin robes. "However," he proceeds, "I know which of you two fatuous old men is most in fault, and I will take such order with him as shall spoil his prophecies for some time to come :—

"Some one go ;
The seats from which he spies the flight of birds,
False augur, with the iron forks o'erthrow,
Scattering in wild confusion all abroad,
And cast his chaplets to the winds and storms."

The elders implore him to cease from his blasphemies : and Cadmus, rather prudently than honestly, counsels him to profess faith in the new deity, if for no other reason, yet for the credit of the family :—

"Even if, as thou declar'st, he were no God,
Call thou him God. It were a splendid falsehood
If Semele be thought t' have borne a God."

But Pentheus spurns this accommodating advice, and Cadmus and Tiresias wend their way to the Bacchanal camp on the mountains. The Chorus takes up the charge of blasphemy, and hints at the end awaiting the impious king :—

"Of tongue unbridled, without awe,
Of madness spurning holy law,
Sorrow is the heaven-doomed close :
But the life of calm repose,
And modest reverence, holds her state,
Unbroken by disturbing fate ;
And knits whole houses in the tie
Of sweet domestic harmony.
Beyond the range of mortal eyes
'Tis not wisdom to be wise."

The wish of Pentheus to have in his power the deluder of the Theban women is soon gratified. Bacchus, in a comely human form, is brought manacled before him. The king, thinking that now he cannot escape, leisurely contemplates the prisoner, and is greatly struck by his appearance :—

"There's beauty, stranger! woman-witching beauty
(Therefore thou art in Thebes) in thy soft form;
Thy fine bright hair, not coarse like the hard athletes,
Is mantling o'er thy cheek warm with desire;
And carefully thou hast cherished thy white skin;
Not in the sun's soft beams, but in cool shade,
Wooing soft Aphroditè with thy loveliness."

Then follows a close examination of the fair-visaged sorcerer about his race, his orgies, and his purpose in coming to Thebes, and at the end of it he is sent off to the "royal stable,"—

"That he may sit in midnight gloom profound:
There lead thy dance! But those thou hast hither led,
Thy guilt's accomplices, we'll sell for slaves;
Or, silencing their noise and beating drums,
As handmaids to the distaff set them down."

Bacchus does not long remain in the dark stable. He appears, "a god-confest," to his worshippers, who are prostrate on the ground, alarmed by the destruction of the palace of Pentheus. They ask how he obtained his freedom; he replies :—

"Myself, myself delivered—with ease and effort slight.
Cho. Thy hands, had he not bound them, in halters strong and tight?

Bac. 'Twas even then I mocked him, he thought me
in his chain;
He touched me not, nor reached me, his idle thoughts
were vain."

Unharmed, unshackled, he again stands before the incensed king. A messenger now arrives—a herdsman from the mountains—who reports that the Bacchanals have broken prison, have defied all attempts to recapture them, are again engaged in their revelries, and have ravaged all the villages and herds that came in their way from the plain to the hill-country. The drama now takes a new turn. Pentheus, his madness fast coming on, admits his late prisoner into his counsels. He will go and witness with his own eyes these hateful orgies: he cannot trust his officers to deal with them. "These women," he says, "without force of arms, I'll bring them in. Give me mine armour." Bacchus offers to be his guide, but tells him that his armour will betray him to the women. He must attire himself in Bacchanalian costume:—

"*Pen.* Lead on and swiftly. Let no time be lost.
Bac. But first enwrap thee in these linen robes.
Pen. What, will he of a man make me a woman?
Bac. Lest they should kill thee, seeing thee as a man."

Here is the true irony of tragedy. Pentheus, who has derided his grandsire and the holy prophet for their unseemly attire and senile folly,—Pentheus, who has threatened to behead the Lydian wizard, and had imprisoned his attendants, is himself persuaded by the god he so abhors to put on the garb of a Bacchanal,

and in that guise to pass through the streets of Thebes. His eagerness to behold the Bacchantes makes him insensible to the indignity of the situation. He asks—

> "What is the second portion of my dress?
> *Bac.* Robes to thy feet, a bonnet on thy head;
> A fawn-skin and a thyrsus in thy hand."

He takes for his guide to the mountains the handsome stranger whom he had so recently ordered to sit in darkness and prepare for death: he is even obsequious to him:—

> "So let us on: I must go forth in arms,
> Or follow the advice thou givest me."

Bacchus calls to his train, and gives his instructions to them how to deal with their prey, when they have him in the toils:—

> "Women! this man is in our net; he goes
> To find his just doom 'mid the Bacchanals.
> Vengeance is ours. Bereave him first of sense;
> Yet be his phrenzy slight. In his right mind
> He never had put on a woman's dress;
> But now, thus shaken in his mind, he'll wear it.
> A laughing-stock I'll make him for all Thebes,
> Led in a woman's dress through the wide city."

The Chorus respond to the summons of their divine leader in passionate and jubilant strains, and anticipate the doom of their persecuting foe:—

> "Slow come, but come at length,
> In their majestic strength,
> Faithful and true, the avenging deities:

And chastening human folly
And the mad pride unholy,
Of those who to the gods bow not their knees!
For hidden still and mute,
As glides their printless foot,
Th' impious on their winding path they hound,
For it is ill to know,
Beyond the law's inexorable bound."

Mania now seizes on Pentheus; two suns he seems to see: a double Thebes: his guide appears to him a horned bull: he recognises among the Bacchic revellers Ino his kinswoman, and Agavè his mother.

The decorum of the Greek stage, or perhaps its imperfect means for representing groups and rapid action, precluded poets generally from bringing before an audience the catastrophe of tragic dramas. Accordingly, we do not see, but are told, by the usual messenger on such occasions, of the miserable end of the proud and impious Theban king. When Bacchus and his victim have climbed one of the spurs of Mount Cithæron, they come

"To a rock-walled glen, watered by a streamlet,
And shadowed o'er with pines: the Mœnads there
Sat, all their hands busy with pleasant toil.
And some the leafy thyrsus, that its ivy
Had dropped away, were garlanding anew:
Like fillies some, unharnessed from the yoke,
Chanted alternate all the Bacchic hymn."

But Pentheus cannot, from the level on which he has halted, see the whole Bacchante troop: he desires to mount on a bank or a tall tree, in order that

"Clearly he may behold their deeds of shame."

Then says the messenger,—

"A wonder then I saw that stranger do.

"He bent the stem of a tall ash-tree, and dragged it to earth till it was bent like a bow. He seated Pentheus on a bough, and then let it rise up again steadily and gently, so that my master should not fall as it mounted. Raised to this giddy height, 'tis true he saw the women, but they too saw him, and speedily brought him down to the ground on which they were standing. But before they did so, the stranger had vanished, and a voice was heard from the heavens proclaiming in clear ringing tones :—

"Behold! I bring,
O maidens, him that you and me, our rites,
Our orgies laughed to scorn. Deal now with him
E'en as you list, and take a full revenge."

The presence of the god, though unseen, was announced by a column of bright flame reddening the sky, and an awful stillness fell on Cithæron and its dark pine-groves. A second shout proclaimed the deity, and the daughters of Cadmus sprang to their feet and rushed forth with the speed of doves on the wing. Down the torrent's bed, down from crag to crag they leaped—"mad with the god." Agavè led on her kin, and at first assailed the seat of Pentheus with idle weapons :—

"First heavy stones they hurled at him,
Climbing a rock in front: the branches of the ash
Darted at some: and some, like javelins,
Sent their sharp thyrsi shrilling through the air,

Pentheus their mark; but yet they struck him not,
His height still baffling all their eager wrath."

At length Agavè cried to her train, "Tear down the tree, and then we'll grasp the *beast*"—for her too had the god made blind—"that rides thereon." A thousand hands uprooted the tree, and Pentheus fell to the ground, well knowing that his end was near. It was his mother's hand that seized him first. In vain, dashing off his bonnet, he cried,—

"I am thy child, thine own, my mother."

She knew him not, and

"Caught him in her arms, seized his right hand,
And, with her feet set on his shrinking side,
Tore out the shoulder."

"Ino, Autonoe, and all the rest dismembered him; one bore away an arm, one a still sandalled foot: others rent open his sides: none went without some spoil of him whom, possessed by Bacchus, they deemed a lion's cub. With these bloody trophies of their prey they are now marching to Thebes: for my part, I fled at the sight of this dark tragedy."

The procession of the Bacchantes to the "seven-gated city" is ushered in by a choral song:—

"Dance and sing
In Bacchic ring;
Shout, shout the fate, the fate of gloom
Of Pentheus, from the dragon born;
He the woman's garb hath worn,
Following the bull, the harbinger that led him to his doom.

O ye Theban Bacchanals!
Attune ye now the hymn victorious,
The hymn all-glorious,
To the tear, and to the groan:
O game of glory!
To bathe the hands besprent and gory
In the blood of her own son."

Believing that she is bringing a lion's head to affix to the walls of the temple, she bears in her arms that of Pentheus, and in concert with the Chorus celebrates in song her ghastly triumph:—

"*Agavè.* O ye Asian Bacchanals!
Chorus. Who is she on us who calls?
Agavè. From the mountains, lo! we bear
To the palace gate
Our new-slain quarry fair.
Chorus. I see, I see, and on thy joy I wait.
Agavè. Without a net, without a snare,
The lion's cub, I took him there."

But Cadmus soon undeceives her. He has been to Cithæron to collect the remains of his grandson which the Bacchanals had left behind; and Agavè, restored to her senses, discerns in her gory burden the head of Pentheus her son. At the close of this fearful story Bacchus appears and informs Cadmus of his doom:—

"Thou, father of this earth-born race,
A dragon shalt become; thy wife shall take
A brutish form at last."

However, after cycles of time have gone by, Cadmus and his wife Harmonia shall resume their human forms, and be borne by Mars to the Isles of the Blest.

That a tragedy in some respects so un-Hellenic and so Oriental in its character should have been well known and highly estimated in the East, is not to be wondered at. Perhaps not the least memorable application of "The Bacchanals" to new circumstances is that mentioned by Plutarch in his 'Life of Crassus.' Great joy was there in the camp of Surenas, the Parthian general, one summer evening, for Crassus the Roman proconsul and the greater part of his army had been slain or taken prisoners, and the residue of the broken legions was hurrying back to the western bank of the Euphrates. Crassus himself lay a headless corpse. To gratify his victorious soldiers, Surenas exhibited a burlesque of a Roman triumph. Himself and his staff feasted in the commander's tent. To the door of the banqueting-hall the head of the Roman general was borne by a Greek actor from Tralles, who introduced it with some appropriate verses from "The Bacchanals" of Euripides. The bloody trophy was thrown at the feet of Surenas and his guests, and the player, seizing it in his hands, enacted the last scene—the frenzy of Agavè and the mutilation of Pentheus.

CHAPTER VII.

ION.—HIPPOLYTUS.

"'Sweet is the holiness of youth'—so felt
Time-honoured Chaucer, when he framed that lay
By which the Prioress beguiled the way,
And many a Pilgrim's rugged heart did melt."
—WORDSWORTH.

So long as the Athenians were a second-rate power in Greece they were content with a military adventurer for the founder of the Ionian race. In a war between Athens and Eubœa, one Xuthus had done them good service; his recompense for it was the hand of the Erectheid princess Creusa, and the issue of the marriage was Ion, from whom the Athenians claimed, remotely, to descend. But when, after the decline of Argos, they had risen to a level with Corinth and Sparta, they aspired to the honour of a divine ancestry on the spear-side, as well as that of a royal one on the spindle. A wandering soldier no longer sufficed: the son of Creusa must not be born in mortal wedlock, but derive his origin from a god. And what deity—in this matter the virgin Pallas Athene was out of the question—was so

fitted by his various gifts to be the forefather of so accomplished a people as the patron of music, poetry, medicine, and prophecy? To set before his fellow-citizens, as well as the strangers and allies who sat in the Dionysiac theatre, the pedigree of the Ionians, and consequently of the Athenians also, Euripides probably composed his "Ion."

Creusa is the daughter of Erectheus, an old autochthonic king of Athens. She has borne a son to Apollo, but through fear of her parents was compelled to leave him, immediately after his birth, in a cave under the Acropolis. The divine father, however, does not abandon the infant, but employs Mercury to transport him to Delphi, and to deposit him on the steps of the temple, where he knows the babe will be cared for. One of the vestals—apparently even then middle-aged, since she is old in the play—finds Ion, and fulfils his sire's expectations. She has, indeed, her own thoughts on the matter, but keeps them to herself until a convenient season comes for disclosing them. In the Delphian temple the foundling receives an education resembling that of the infant Samuel. He thus describes his functions :—

"My task, which from my early infancy
Hath been my charge, is with these laurel boughs
And sacred wreaths to cleanse the vestibule
Of Phœbus, on the pavements moistening dews
To rain, and with my bow to chase the birds
Which would defile the hallowed ornaments.
A mother's fondness and a father's care
I never knew; the temple of the god
Claims then my service, for it nurtured me."

He receives the strangers who come to consult the oracle or to see the wonders of the shrine, and shows himself, by turns, an expert ritualist or a polite *cicerone.* Centuries later, Ion would have had his place among the youthful ascetics who, by the beauty of their lives, and sometimes of their persons also, adorned the church and edified or rebuked the world. But this early Basil or Gregory of Delphi had other work destined for him than serving at the altar or waiting on pilgrims. He will have to go out of "religion" into the haunts of men: the privilege of celibacy is denied him; his ephod he must exchange for a breastplate, his laurel wreath for a plumed helmet. The name of Ion is due to an illustrious race.

Of all extant Greek dramas, this beautiful one, though easy for readers to understand, is the most complex in its action, and possibly may have kept the original spectators of it, in spite of the information given by Mercury in the prologue, in suspense up to its very last scene. In fact, the principal characters are all at cross-purposes. Creusa has come to Delphi on the pretext that a friend of hers is anxious to learn what has become of a son whom she has borne to Apollo—her own story transferred to another. Her husband Xuthus is there to ask advice from the neighbouring oracle of Trophonius by what means Creusa and himself may cease to be childless. While he goes on his errand, his wife encounters Ion in the fore-court of the temple, and their conversation begins with the following words:—

"*Ion.* Lady, whoe'er thou art, that liberal air
Speaks an exalted mind: there is a grace,
A dignity in those of noble birth,
That marks their high rank. Yet I marvel much
That from thy closèd lids the trickling tear
Watered thy beauteous cheeks, soon as thine eye
Beheld this chaste oracular seat of Phœbus.
What brings this sorrow, lady? All besides,
Viewing the temple of the god, are struck
With joy; thy melting eye o'erflows with tears.
Creusa. Not without reason, stranger, art thou seized
With wonder at my tears; this sacred dome
Wakens the sad remembrance of things past."

In a long dialogue she communicates to her unknown son part of her own story, and by casting some reflections on the god for his conduct to her supposed friend, incurs a rebuke from the fair young acolyte. The Chorus remarks that mankind are very unlucky—they rarely get what they wish for:—

"One single blessing
By any one through life is scarcely found."

And Creusa, not at all abashed by Ion's remonstrance, proceeds to complain of Apollo's conduct towards herself and their son.

Xuthus now returns from the Trophonian crypt with good news for his wife and himself. Trophonius, indeed, being a very subordinate deity, "held it unmeet to forestall the answer of a superior one;" "but," says Xuthus,—

"One thing he told me,
That childless I should not return, nor thou,
Home from the oracle;"

and then goes into the adytum to learn his fortune.

Ion again expresses his surprise at the strange lady's shrewish, and indeed as he thinks it, rather impious, language; but says, "What is the daughter of Erectheus to me? let me to my task." He admits, however (infected apparently by Creusa's boldness), that his patron has acted unhandsomely to some virgin or other:

> "Becoming thus
> By stealth a father, leaving then his children
> To die, regardless of them."

Xuthus reappears, with this command from the Pythoness: "The first male stranger whom you meet, address as your son." Of course the stranger is Ion; but being greeted with the words, "Health to my son!" by one whom he has never before set eyes on, he is far more offended than pleased by this unlooked-for salutation; and, not at all unreasonably, all things considered, he recoils, when Xuthus proceeds to embrace him, and asks—

> "Art thou, stranger,
> Well in thy wits; or hath the god's displeasure
> Bereft thee of thy reason?"

He, a minister of the temple, objects to being thus claimed as so near of kin by a man whose business there he has yet to learn: he says, "Hands off, friend—they'll mar the garlands of the god;" and adds, "If you keep not your distance, you shall have my arrow in your heart:"—

> "I am not fond of curing wayward strangers
> And mad men."

"If you kill me," replies Xuthus, "you will kill your father." "You my father!" cries Ion; "how so? It makes me laugh to hear you." A strict examination of the father by the son ensues; and at last, neither of the disputants being very critical, and both very devout, the sudden relationship is accepted with full faith by both, and they tenderly embrace each other. Xuthus then imparts to Ion his purpose of taking him to Athens, but of concealing their position for a while. His wife, he argues, may not be greatly pleased at being so suddenly provided with a ready-made son and heir. She comes of a royal house, and so is particular on the score of "blue blood." The youngster, if adopted, will inherit her property. The discovery of him may be all very well for her husband, who, having once been a wanderer, may, for all she knows, have a son in many towns, Greek or barbaric. But how will this treasure-trove remove from herself the reproach of barrenness? There is, too, such a thing as *pre*-nuptial as well as *post*-nuptial jealousy; and though so comely, gracious, and religious a youth cannot fail, after a time, to ingratiate himself even with a step-mother, there may be much domestic controversy before so desirable a consummation is possible. Xuthus then informs Ion that he intends to celebrate this joyful event by a sacrifice to Apollo, and by a general feast to the Delphians:—

> "At my table
> Will I receive thee as a welcome guest,
> And cheer thee with the banquet, then conduct thee
> To Athens with me as a visitant."

On leaving the stage he tells the Chorus, who, of course, have heard the real story, to keep what they know to themselves. If they let his wife into the secret they shall surely die; and, inasmuch as they are Athenian women, Xuthus has the right to threaten, as well as the means to keep his promise. For one who has seen so much of the world, it argues much simplicity in Xuthus to have imagined that even the fear of death will insure silence in some people. Creusa is very soon made aware by her female attendants of her husband's scheme for deceiving her, and she behaves exactly as he had foreseen she would. She re-enters, accompanied by an aged servant of her house: when the Chorus enlighten her on every point except one—the name of Ion's mother; and "the venerable man" is exactly the instrument needed by an indignant woman, for

> "It is the curse of kings to be attended
> By slaves that take their humours for a warrant
> To break within the bloody house of life." *

"We," says the prompter of evil, "by thy husband are betrayed." This comes of unequal marriages. Of him we know as little as of his new-found bantling:—

> "Xuthus
> Came to the city and thy royal house,
> And wedded thee, all thy inheritance
> Receiving. By some other woman now
> Discovered to have children privately—
> How privately I'll tell thee—when he saw

* "King John," act iv. sc. 2.

Thou hadst no child, it pleased him not to bear
A fate like thine; but by some favourite slave,
His paramour by stealth, he hath a son.
Him to some Delphian gave he, distant far,
To educate, who, to this sacred house
Consigned, as secret here, received his nurture.
He, knowing this, and that his son advanced
To manhood was, urged thee to come hither,
Pleading thy barrenness. 'Twas not the god,
But Xuthus, who deceived thee, and long since
Devised this wily plan to rear his son.
Failing, he could on Phœbus fix the blame,
Succeeding, would adroitly choose the time
To make him ruler of thy rightful land."

The servant—loyal to his mistress as Evan dhu Maccombich was to Fergus MacIvor, equally ready to die for her, or to do murder to avenge her imagined wrongs—devises a plot that would have been quite successful had not Apollo been on the watch. Creusa is in possession of a deadly poison—"two drops of blood that from the Gorgon fell"—given to her father Erectheus by Pallas. One heals disease, the other works certain and swift death. The princess proposes to poison her stepson when he is beneath her roof. "I like not *that*," says the servant. "There you will be the first to be suspected; a stepdame's hate is proverbial." To this Creusa agrees, and, anticipating the old vassal's thought, she herself prescribes the mode of destroying the son of Xuthus:—

"This shalt thou do: this little golden casket
Take from my hand. Bear it beneath thy vest.
Then, supper ended, when they 'gin to pour

Libations to the gods, do thou infuse
The drop in the youth's goblet. Take good heed
That none observe thee. Drug his cup alone
Who thinks to lord it o'er my house. If once
It pass his lips, his foot shall never reach
Athens' fair city; death awaits him here."

After a choral ode has been sung, a breathless attendant rushes in and demands where Creusa is. The plot has failed; the old man has been arrested; he has confessed the deed; and the rulers of Delphi are in hot pursuit of his accomplice, that she may die overwhelmed with stones. "How were our dark devices brought to light?" the Chorus inquires. Then, as usual on the Greek stage, and also in the French classical drama, a long narrative instructs the spectators of what has taken place. Up to a certain point all went well. Ion's chalice was drugged furtively. The destined victim poured his libation, and was just about to drink, when some one chanced to utter a word of ill omen, and so Ion poured his wine on the floor, and bade the other guests do the like. The cups are now replenished; but in the pause that ensued between the first and second filling of them, a troop of doves, such as haunt the dome of the temple, came fluttering in, and drank from the wine-pools on the ground. The spilt wine was harmless to all save one. That one drank of the deadly draught poured out by Ion:—

"Straight, convulsive shiverings seized
Her beauteous plumes, around in giddy rings
She whirled, and in a strange and mournful note

Seemed to lament: amazement seized the guests,
Seeing the poor bird's pangs: her breast heaved thick,
And, stretching out her scarlet legs, she died."

Creusa now hurries in: she has been doomed to death by the Pythian Council, and her executioner is to be Ion himself: she clasps the altar of Apollo, but that sanctuary will not avail her, for has she not attempted the life of one of the god's ministers? In reply to her appeals for life, Ion says:—

"The good,
Oppressed by wrongs, should at those hallowed seats
Find refuge: ill becomes it that th' unjust
And just alike should seek protection there."

But now the old prophetess, who had years before preserved the infant Ion, having learnt that he is soon to leave the Delphian shrine, produces the swaddling-clothes, the ornaments, and the basket, in which his mother had clad and laid him in the cave under the Acropolis. They may help him, she thinks, some day, to discover the secret of his birth. While her son is examining these tokens, Creusa sees them too, and claims them as the work of her own hands. As Ion unfolds, one by one, the tiny robes, she names, without first seeing them, the subjects which were embroidered on each of them. The recognition is complete. Creusa embraces her long-lost son, and now hesitates not to acknowledge that Apollo is his father. If any doubt remained even on the part of Xuthus, who indeed is not an eyewitness of the discovery, it is dispersed by the speech of Minerva. She ex-

plains the reasons for concealment hitherto, and the cause for disclosure now: bids Creusa take her son to the land of Cecrops, and there seat him on the throne of his grandsire Erectheus. She concludes with a prediction of the fortunes of the Ionian race, and of the Dorians, who are to descend from Dorus, a son she is to bear to Xuthus. And thus Apollo is absolved from wrong, and Creusa rejoices in the prospect of becoming the mother of two Greek nations, and these the rival leaders of the Hellenic world.

Should this exquisitely beautiful play be ranked among tragedies or comedies? Neither title exactly suits it. Rather is it a melodrama. And but for a few ceremonies inherent in or necessary to the Greek stage, might it not be almost accounted the work of a modern poet? The complexity of the fable, the rapid transitions in the action, the picturesque beauty of the scenes, and the domestic nature of the emotions it excites, have a far less classic than romantic stamp. For the long speech of the attendant who describes the manner in which the plot against the life of the hero is baffled, substitute a representation on the stage of the banquet—cancel the prologue spoken by Mercury, and the winding-up scene in which Minerva appears—and then, even without omitting the Chorus, there will remain a mixed drama which neither Calderon nor Shakespeare might have disdained to own. Perhaps the modern air that we attribute to it may have been among the reasons for the comparative neglect of the "Ion" by the ancient critics—nay even, it might seem, by those who witnessed the performance of it. But neither the date of

its production nor the trilogy of which it formed a part is known. It may be, as regards "its general composition, more pleasing than powerful." We agree, however, entirely with Mr Paley, when he says: "none of his plays so clearly show the fine mind of Euripides, or impress us with a more favourable idea of his virtuous and human character."

HIPPOLYTUS.

The play which has just been surveyed is of a religious character, and the "Hippolytus" is coupled with it, because, although dealing with human passion far more than the "Ion," the principal character in it is also that of a devotee. However philosophical or sceptical Euripides may have been in his theological opinions, no one of the Greek dramatic poets surpassed him in the delineation of piety and reverence for the gods; and he seems to have delighted especially in portraying the effect of such feelings upon pure and youthful minds. If, indeed, fear rather than love of the gods be essential to devotion, then Æschylus must be accounted a far more pious writer than Euripides. The Calvinists of criticism will naturally prefer gloom and terror, inexorable Fates and all-powerful Furies, to the humane, benign, and rational sentiments which consist with the attributes of mercy and justice. We neither expect nor desire to reconcile these opposite factions further than may be necessary for a statement of the claims of the younger poet to a fair hearing.

"Ion" and "Hippolytus" are each of them examples of youthful virtue: the latter has, or at least displays, the more enthusiastic temperament, which, however, is drawn out from him by the greater severity of his lot. Yet we can easily conceive the votary of the chaste Diana passing through life quite as contentedly in her service as Ion would have passed his days as a minister of Apollo. It was the hard destiny of the son of Theseus to have incurred the heavy displeasure of one goddess through his earnest devotion to another. The life-battle he has to fight is indeed really a contest between two rival divinities; and were second titles possible in Greek plays, this affecting and noble tragedy might be entitled "Hippolytus, or the Contest between Venus and Diana."

As the plot of the "Hippolytus" is, through the "Phédre" of Racine, probably better known to English readers than the more complicated fable of the "Ion," it may be sufficient to state it briefly, and to direct attention rather to the characters than the story. The hero is the son of Theseus, king of Athens, by the Amazonian Hippolyta, whom Shakespeare has sketched in his "Midsummer Night's Dream." His boyish years have been passed at Troezen with his grandfather, the pure-minded Pittheus. While under his roof, Hippolytus devotes himself to the worship of Diana: like her he delights in the chase; like her also he shuns the snares of love or the chains of wedlock. Excelling in all manly exercises, and adorned with every virtue, he unhappily not merely neglects Venus, but irritates her by open expressions of contempt for

herself and her rites: and he owes to this pride or exclusive zeal the hideous ruin which engulfs him. The offended goddess sets forth in the prologue her determination to destroy Diana's favourite, and gives her reasons for it. She says:—

> "Those that reverence my powers I favour,
> But I confound all who think scorn of me.
> For even divinity is fashioned thus—
> It joys in mortal honours."

"He may consort with the huntress, he may follow his swift dogs, he may shun fellowship with men, as much as he likes—of his tastes I reck not: what I cannot overlook is his personally offensive conduct to myself, 'a goddess not inglorious,' and accounted by mortals generally as not the least potent of Olympians." The means of revenge are not far to seek. Phædra, his young and beauteous stepmother, is pining for love of him, and through her unhappy passion he shall be struck: "with her I have no quarrel," says the goddess—

> "Yet let her perish:
> I have not for her life that tenderness
> As not to wreak just vengeance on my foes."

The prologue ended, Venus disappears, and Hippolytus and his retinue of huntsmen enter, singing a hymn to Diana. When it is finished, he thus addresses the goddess—an invocation which has been thus beautifully paraphrased:—

"Thou maid of maids, Diana, the goddess whom he fears,
Unto thee Hippolytus this flowery chaplet bears;

From meadows where no shepherd his flock a-field e'er drove,
From where no woodman's hatchet hath woke the echoing grove,
Where o'er the unshorn meadow the wild bee passes free,
Where by her river-haunts dwells virgin Modesty;
Where he who knoweth nothing of the wisdom of the schools
Beareth in a virgin heart the fairest of all rules;
To him 'tis given all freely to cull those self-sown flowers,
But evil men must touch not pure Nature's sacred bowers.
This to his virgin mistress a virgin hand doth bear—
A wreath of unsoiled flowers to deck her golden hair.
For such alone of mortals can unto her draw nigh,
And with that guardian Goddess hold solemn converse high.
He ever hears the voice of his own virgin Queen,
He hears what others hear not, and sees her though unseen;
He holds his virgin purpose in freedom unbeguiled,
To age and death advancing in innocence a child." *
—(Isaac Williams.)

Hippolytus is warned by his henchman that he is incurring danger by his total neglect of Venus; but he replies only by a rather contumelious remark that "I salute her from afar;" "some with this god and some with that have dealings;" and then the master and his men depart to a banquet. We pass onward to Phædra's entrance, which is announced by her ancient nurse, much such an accommodating personage as the

* With this exception, all the translated passages in this chapter are taken from Mr Maurice Purcell Fitzgerald's admirable version of "The Crowned Hippolytus."

nurse in "Romeo and Juliet," although far more mischievous. She describes the strange malady of her mistress, and her own weary watching by the sufferer's couch. Phædra breaks out into frenzied song:—

"Lift up my body,
Straighten my head,
Hold up the hands
And arms of the dead;
The joints of my limbs are loosened,
The veil on my brow is like lead.
Take it off, take it off, let the clustering curls
On my shoulders be spread."

She pants for cooling streams and the whispering sound of shadowing poplars, and longs to stretch her limbs in repose on the verdurous meadow. Next comes an access of fever, and she breaks forth into wilder strains:—

"Send me, send me to the mountain: I will wander to the wood,
Where the dogs amid the pine-copse track and tear the wild beast's brood;
I will hang upon his traces where the dappled roebuck bounds:
I yearn, by all the gods, I yearn to halloo to the hounds,
To poise the lance of Thessaly above my yellow hair,
And to loose my hand and lightly launch the barbèd point through air."

After more wild song and as wild speeches to the nurse, her secret is at length drawn from her; and that faithful but unscrupulous attendant reveals it,

under an oath of secrecy, to Hippolytus. Diana's worshipper, shocked at the disclosure, discourses on the profligacy of women in general, and determines to absent himself for a while until Theseus returns to Troezen, with the intention, as Phædra and her nurse believe, of disclosing to his father his wife's infidelity. Overwhelmed by shame and despair, Phædra hangs herself, but suspends from her neck a letter in which she accuses Hippolytus of making dishonourable proposals to her. Theseus, on his return from an oracle he had been consulting, finds his wife a lifeless corpse, and believes in his son's guilt. Him he curses as a base hypocrite, who, affecting to worship the chaste goddess, has attempted to commit a crime that even Venus would scarcely sanction. His supposed father Neptune, in an evil moment, had once given Theseus three fatal curses, one of which he now hurls at his innocent son. Hippolytus now turns his back for ever on his father's house: weeping, and attended by his weeping friends, he drives slowly and sadly along the sea-beach. The curse comes upon him in the form of a monster sent by Neptune. A messenger brings the tidings to Theseus. "There came," he says, "when we had passed the frontier of this realm of Troezen,—

"A sound, as if some bolt from Zeus
Made thunder from the bowels of the earth—
A heavy hollow boom, hideous to hear.
A sudden fear fell on our youthful hearts
Whence came this awful voice: till with fixed gaze
Watching the sea-beat ridges, we beheld

A mighty billow lifted to the skies;
And with the billow, at the third great sweep
Of mountain surge, the sea gave up a bull,
Monster of aspect fierce, whose bellowings
Filled all the earth, that echoed back the roar
In tones that made us shudder."

The terrified horses become unmanageable; and though

"Our lord, in all their ways long conversant,
Grasped at their reins, and, throwing back his weight,
Pulled hard, as pulls a sailor at the oar;
They, with set jaws gripping the tempered bits,
Whirl along heedless of the master's hand,"—

until Hippolytus is dragged and dashed against the rocks, and lies a broken and bleeding body from which the spirit is rapidly fleeting. He is borne into his father's presence, torn, mangled, and bleeding, to die. But Theseus, still crediting Phædra's false letter, rejoices in his son's fate, although he alone believes him guilty. The messenger, indeed, bluntly tells the king that he is deceived:—

"Yet to one thing I never will give credence,
That this thy son has done a deed of baseness,—
Not should the whole of womankind go hang,
And score the pines of Ida with their letters,
Because I know—I know that he is noble."

Diana, it may seem to the reader, is far from being a help to her devoted friend and worshipper in his time of trouble. The cause she assigns for her inability to save him gives a curious insight into the

comity of the ancient gods. She tells Theseus that his sin is rank, yet not quite unpardonable :—

"For Cypris willed that these things should be so
To glut her rage ; and this with gods is law,
That none against another's will resists
Or offers hindrance, but we stand aloof.
Else be assured, had not the fear of Zeus
Deterred me, I had not so sunk in shame
As to let die the dearest unto me
Of mortal men."

She then shows to Theseus how widely he has erred. Next follows a most affecting scene of reconciliation between the distracted father and his dying son. Diana soothes the last moments of Hippolytus by a promise that he shall be worshipped with highest honours at Troezen :—

"For girls unwed, before their marriage-day,
Shall offer their shorn tresses at thy shrine,
And dower thee through long ages with rich tears ;
And many a maid shall raise the tuneful hymn
In praise of thee, and ne'er shall Phædra's love
Perish in silence and be left unsung."

The "Hippolytus" was produced in B.C. 428. In the previous year Pericles died of the plague, which for some months longer continued to rage in Athens. To the pestilence and the death of the greatest of Attic statesmen there are palpable allusions in this tragedy, which to contemporary spectators cannot fail to have been deeply affecting. The nurse of Phædra bewails her lot as an attendant on a suffering mistress :—

"Alas for mortal woes!
Alas for fell disease!
Better be sick than be the sick one's nurse;
Sickness is sickness, nothing worse;
Nursing is sorrow in double kind,
Sorrow of toiling hands, sorrow of troubled mind.
Our troubles know no healing."

And the final stave of the choral song unmistakably refers to Pericles:—

"Upon all in the city alike
This sudden sorrow will strike.
There will be much shedding of tears.
When evil assails the great
Many bewail his fate;
Grief for him grows with the years."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PHŒNICIAN WOMEN.—THE SUPPLIANTS.—THE CHILDREN OF HERCULES.—THE PHRENZY OF HERCULES.

> "Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
> Yet neither conqueror nor conquerèd;
> So is the equal poise of this fell war."
> —"Henry VI., 3d Part.

Even did space permit, it is unnecessary to dwell minutely upon several of the plays of Euripides. The seven extant dramas of Æschylus and the same number of those of Sophocles deserved and admitted of analysis, and already seven pieces of their rival's have passed under review. Of the ten which remain, some were occasional plays; others have apparently no connection with one another, even did we happen to know the trilogy to which they belonged. Of these, some would seem to have been composed for a special purpose—either local, as complimentary to Athens, or political, with a view to the affairs of Greece when they were produced. For English readers they retain little interest; yet although their merits as dramas are slight, they, like all the author's writings, contain

some admirable poetry, or some effective scenes and situations.

In the "Phœnician Women," Euripides displays some of his greatest defects in the construction of a tragedy, and some of his most conspicuous beauties as a pathetic and picturesque writer. As to its plot, it is cumbrous; and, what is still worse, he competes in it with the "Antigone" of Sophocles and the "Seven against Thebes" of Æschylus. Jocasta, who in "Œdipus the King" destroys herself, is alive again in this drama. The brothers, whose rivalry and death by each other's hand were familiar to all, repeat their duel, and the devotion of Antigone to her blind father and her younger brother is brought or rather crammed into it at the end. We have, in fact, almost a trilogy pressed into a single member of it, and in consequence the "Phœnician Women" is, with the exception of the "Œdipus at Colonus," the longest of extant Greek tragedies. Euripides forgot the sound advice given by the poetess Corinna to her youthful rival, Pindar. He had been, she thought, too profuse in his mythological stories, and therefore advised him for the future "to sow with the hand and not with the sack."

As the story of the "Phœnician Women" has in the main been already told in the volume of this series devoted to Æschylus, and also as many English readers are acquainted with the "Frères Ennemis" of Racine, it is not perhaps necessary to detail again the tale of Eteocles and Polynices. It will suffice to present a portion of one or two scenes, so as to give some idea of the pure ore that lies embedded in this tragical

conglomerate. The scene in which the old servant of the royal house leads Antigone to a tower whence she gazes upon the Argive host encamped around Thebes, even though it is borrowed from that book of the Iliad in which Helen surveys from the walls of Troy the Achæan chieftains, exhibits a master's hand. The servant can point out to his young mistress the leaders of the Argives, and describe the blazonry of their shields, because he has been in their camp, when he took to Polynices the offer of a truce. After carefully exploring the ground to make sure that no Theban is in sight, whose gaze might light on the maiden, he says to her:—

"Come then, ascend this height, let thy foot tread
These stairs of ancient cedar, thence survey
The plains beneath: see what an host of foes
At Dirce's fount encamp, and stretch along
The valley where Ismenus rolls his stream."

Antigone, at her first view from the palace-roof, exclaims:—

"Awful Diana, virgin goddess, see
The field all brass glares like the lightning's blaze."

The old man then points out to her the captains of the numerous host which Polynices has led thither to assert his rights. Among other heroes, he singles out one as likely to interest his young mistress. "Seest thou," he says,

"That chief now passing o'er the stream
Of Dircè?

Antig. Different he, of different guise
His arms. Who is the warrior?
Phoe. Tydeus he,
The son of Œneus.
Antig. What! the prince who made
The sister of my brother's bride his choice?"

The young and graceful Parthenopæus, the proud boaster Capaneus, and Hippomedon, that "haughty king," are pointed out; but Antigone casts only a passing glance on these, and yearns to behold her brother. "Where is my Polynices, tell me?" "He is standing there near the tomb of Niobe," is the reply. "I see him, but indistinctly," says the princess; "I see the semblance of his form:"—

"O could I, like a nimble-moving cloud,
Fly through the air, borne on the winged winds,
Fly to my brother: I would throw my arms
Round his dear neck, unhappy youth, so long
An exile. Mark him, good old man, O mark
How graceful in his golden arms he stands,
And glitters like the bright sun's orient rays.
Serv. The truce will bring him hither: in this house
His presence soon will fill thy soul with joy."

Although not among the leading characters, Menœceus, the son of Creon, Jocasta's brother, is a most interesting one. The prophet Tiresias has declared that Thebes must be taken by the Seven, unless this youth will die for the people. In deep distress Creon implores his son to quit this fatal land. Menœceus, "with an honest fraud," deceiving his father, freely gives his life. He says:—

"Were it not base
While those, whom no compulsion of the gods,
No oracle demands, fight for their country,
Should I betray my father, brother, city,
And like a craven yield to abject fear?
No—by Jove's throne among the golden stars—
No, by the blood-stained Mars, I'll take my stand
Upon the highest battlement of Thebes,
And from it, as the prophet's voice gave warning,
I'll plunge into the dragon's gloomy cave,
And free this suffering land."

The interview between the brothers is too long for extract, and would be marred by compression. One of the sentiments, however, expressed by the fierce and unjust Eteocles, is so truly in Shakespeare's vein, that we cannot pass it over. The usurping Theban king says :—

"For honour I would mount above the stars,
Above the sun's high course, or sink beneath
Earth's deepest centre, might I so obtain
This idol of my soul, this worshipt power
Of regal state ; and to another never
Would I resign her ; but myself engross
The splendid honour : it were base indeed
To barter for low rank a kingly crown.
And shame it were that he who comes in arms,
Spreading o'er this brave realm the waste of war,
Should his rude will enjoy : all Thebes would blush
At my dishonour, did I, craven-like,
Shrink from the Argive spear, and to his hand
Resign my rightful sceptre."

Hotspur speaks much in the same strain of "honour :"—

"By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon;
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drownèd honour by the locks;
So he, that doth redeem her thence, might wear
Without co-rival all her dignities."

By the voluntary death of Menœceus victory is on the Theban side. The description of the battle is among the most striking of dramatic war-scenes. A messenger then enters with further tidings. He tells Jocasta that her sons have agreed to spare further shedding of blood, and to decide their quarrel by single combat. Here is a new woe added to the many calamities of the house of Laïus. Jocasta hurries to prevent this unnatural duel, but arrives too late. A second messenger then describes the deadly strife in which the brothers have fallen, and also Jocasta's death by her own hands. The bodies of the two fratricides are brought on the stage, and a funeral wail is sung by Antigone and the Chorus. For her a new tragedy is commencing. Reft of her mother, her betrothed Menœceus, and her brothers, she is forbidden by Creon, now become regent of Thebes, to perform the last functions for her dear Polynices. The tragedy concludes with her declaration that man may make cruel laws, and forbid the rites of sepulture, but she will obey a higher law, that of nature, and do meet honour to the dead. That no circumstance of sorrow may be wanting to Antigone's lot, blind, old, discrowned Œdipus is sentenced to banishment for

ever from his late kingdom. His sons unrighteously deposed him; he rashly cursed them in his ire: the curse has been fatal to his whole house, and now falls on his own head. He who, by baffling the Sphinx, won a kingdom, goes forth from it a beggar to eat the bitter bread of exile. With him goes his daughter, the one steadfast star left to guide him on his dark way. The shade of Laïus is at length appeased: the sceptre has for ever departed from the house of Labdacus.

"The Suppliants" is, as regards the time of action, a sequel to "The Phœnicians" and "The Seven against Thebes" of Æschylus. Creon persists in denying the rites of sepulture to the fallen Argive chieftains. The commander of that disastrous expedition, Adrastus, now the sole survivor of the seven, hurries to Eleusis on the Athenian border, accompanied by the widows and sons of the slain, and takes refuge at the altar of Demeter. A passage from "The Two Noble Kinsmen" of Fletcher explains far better than the prologue of the Greek tragedy does the errand of the Suppliants:—

"We are six queens, whose sovereigns fell before
The wrath of cruel Creon: who endure
The beaks of ravens, talons of the kites,
And pecks of crows, in the foul fields of Thebes:
He will not suffer us to burn their bones,
To urn their ashes, nor to take th' offence
Of mortal loathsomeness from the blest eye
Of holy Phœbus, but infects the winds
With stench of our slain lords. Oh, pity, Duke!
Thou purger of the earth, draw thy feared sword
That does good turns to the world: give us the bones

Of our dead kings, that we may chapel them,
And of thy boundless goodness take some note
That for our crownèd heads we have no roof
Save this, which is the lion's and the bear's,
And vault for everything."

Through the mediation of Æthra, mother of Theseus, king of Athens, the Suppliants are enabled to bring their wrongs before him. Theseus at first is unwilling to espouse their cause: to do so will embroil Athens in a war with Thebes. He is by no means a cheerful giver of aid: revolving in his soul "the various turns of chance below," he expatiates on the uncertainty of human greatness, and hints that Adrastus himself is an instance of the folly of interfering with other people's business. But Æthra, whose woman's nature is deeply moved by the tears of the widowed queens, will hear of no denial; and Theseus at last, though reluctantly, promises to take up their cause. Just as he is despatching a herald to Creon to demand the bodies of the slain, a Theban messenger comes with a peremptory mandate from Creon that Adrastus and his companions be delivered up. It must be owned that, at this juncture, Theseus is rather a proser. Forgetting the urgency of the case—that dogs and vultures may already be preying on the dead—he discourses on the comparative merits of aristocratic and popular government, and on the sin of refusing burial even to enemies. Theseus in the end consents to do what, to be done well, ought to be done quickly. He sends back the Theban herald, after rating him soundly, with a stern response to his master. He follows at

the herald's heels, defeats Creon, and brings back to Eleusis the bodies of the Argive princes. The Chorus enters in procession, chanting a dirge. Adrastus speaks the funeral oration. The dead are then placed on a pyre, and when it is kindled, Evadne, wife of the boaster Capaneus, leaps on his pile. Finally, a deity appears as mediator. Minerva ratifies a treaty between Argos and Athens, and predicts that, at no distant day, the now worsted Argos will, in its turn, humble the pride of Thebes.

In this tragedy there is a monotony of woe, not relieved, as in the case of "The Trojan Women" of Euripides, by a series of beautiful choral odes and picturesque situations. The red flames of the six funeral pyres, indeed, must have been effective; and a second Chorus of youths, the orphaned sons of the chieftains, have deepened the pathos excited by the suppliant queens. By it the dramatist employed two of his favourite modes of touching the spectators—the aid of women and the introduction of children. Perhaps he had witnessed that sad and solemn spectacle at which Pericles pronounced the encomium over the firstlings of the slain in the Peloponnesian war, and so transferred to a mimic scene the reality of a people's mourning.

"The Children of Hercules" need not detain us long, its drift being very similar to that of the tragedy of "The Suppliants." Apparently it was written at a time when Argos was recovering some of her earlier importance among Dorian states, owing to the strain put upon the resources of Sparta by the length of her

war with Athens. The Argives, it might be feared, were inclined to throw their weight into the scale of Thebes and Lacedæmon, and stood in need of some timely advice. The children of Hercules, hunted by their enemies, and driven to take sanctuary at Marathon, where the scene of action is laid, were sheltered by Athens, and from these fugitives the Argives of the time of Euripides were supposed to descend. Let Argos now bear in mind this good service: let her remember also the many and grievous wrongs done to her by the cruel and faithless Spartans. If Thebes and the Argive government enabled Sparta to enfeeble Athens, and so disturb the balance of power in Greece, who would be the gainer by such league? Who the loser would be it was not difficult to foresee. When was Sparta, in her prosperity, ever faithful to her allies, or even commonly just? What had Thebes ever done for Argos to make alliance with her desirable? Who had been the real benefactors of the Argive people, their kinsfolk in blood, or the Ionians of Attica? With Athens to aid her, she might regain the position she once held among the Dorian race: but if Athens fell she would be as the Messenians were now, little more than an appanage of the kings or ephors of her powerful neighbour.

Passing over this play as historically rather than dramatically interesting to modern readers, we come now to "The Phrenzy of Hercules," which for some fine scenes in it, and some very curious Euripidean theology, deserves attention. It presents no tokens of having

been a hurried or occasional composition. Amphitryon, who delivers the prologue, is, with Megara, the wife of Hercules, and her sons, cruelly treated by Lycus, king, or more properly the usurping tyrant, of Thebes. He, an adventurer from Eubœa, had slain Creon, lord of that city; and to insure himself on his throne, has ordered Megara, Creon's daughter, and her children by Hercules, for execution. Her husband is at the time detained in Hades, whither he has gone on a very hazardous expedition, and his family despair of his return. Lycus, his "wish being father to the thought," is of the same opinion; but fearing that the young Heracleids may some day requite him for the murder of their grandfather Creon, he resolves, like Macbeth, to put his mind at ease by despatching all "Banquo's issue." But on this point both the tyrant and his victims are mistaken, for just as Amphitryon, Megara, and the children, are being led forth to death, Hercules returns, rescues his family, and delivers Thebes from its Eubœan intruder.

The taint of blood, however, is on the redresser of wrongs, and from it he must be purified by sacrifice to the gods. And now a worse foe to Hercules than Lycus had been assails him. Juno, whose ire against Jupiter's and Alcmena's son is as unappeasable as her hatred towards Paris and Troy, is not pleased with the turn matters are taking. It has been of no avail to send the object of her spleen to bring up Cerberus from below. Pluto has not, as she hoped her grimy brother-in-law would have done, clapped him into prison, nor Charon refused him homeward passage over the Styx.

In the "Alcestis" we have had an impersonation of Death; in the drama now before us there is one of Madness (Lyssa), a daughter of Night, who bears the goddess's instructions to render Hercules a maniac. For this errand Madness has no relish: she is more scrupulous than the Queen of Gods. "It is shameful," she says, "to persecute one who has served mankind so well—destroying beasts of prey, and executing justice on many notorious thieves and cut-throats." But Iris, one of the Olympian couriers, tells Lyssa, whom she accompanies, that "Juno is not a person to be trifled with; that unless mortals in future be permitted to board divinities, Hercules must be made to feel the full weight of celestial wrath. If a god or a goddess be out of temper, even the best and most valiant of men must smart." Reluctantly Lyssa complies with the divine hest. Hercules, while engaged in the expiatory sacrifice, goes suddenly distraught: conceiving them to be foes, he murders his wife and their three sons, narrowly misses sending his earthly father, Amphitryon, to the Shades, and is exhibited, after an interval filled up with a Choric song, bound, as a dangerous lunatic, with cords to a pillar. The bleeding corpses of his household lie before him. Restored to his right mind, he is appalled by his own deed. Theseus, whom Hercules has just before released from durance in Pluto's realm, comes on and offers to his deliverer ghostly consolation. The pair of friends depart for Athens, where the maniac shall be purged of his offence to heaven. Only in the city of the Virgin-goddess can rest and absolution be accorded to him.

In "The Suppliants" we have some insight into the political opinions of its author. In "The Phrenzy of Hercules" there is a glimpse of his theology. Very early in this drama are religious sentiments, not, indeed, of a very consistent nature, introduced. Amphitryon, for example, when his prospects are most gloomy, taxes Jupiter with unfair dealing towards his copartner in marriage, to his daughter-in-law Megara, and to his grandsons. But when Lycus has been slain, then the Chorus proclaims that a signal instance of divine justice has been shown. When Hercules regains his senses, Theseus labours to put his soul at ease by the following arguments :—

"This ruin from none other god proceeds
Than from the wife of Jove. Well thou dost know
To counsel others is an easier task
Than to bear ills : yet none of mortal men
Escape unhurt by fortune ; not the gods,
Unless the stories of the bards be false.
Have they not formed connubial ties, to which
No law assents ? Have they not galled with chains
Their fathers through ambition ? Yet they hold
Their mansions on Olympus, and their wrongs
With patience bear. What wilt thou say, if thou,
A mortal born, too proudly shouldst contend
'Gainst adverse fortune ?"

To which Hercules replies :—

"Ah me ! all this is foreign to my ills.
I deem not of the gods, as having formed
Connubial ties to which no law assents,
Nor as opprest with chains : disgraceful this
I hold, nor ever will believe that one

Lords it o'er others: of no foreign aid
The God, who is indeed a God, hath need:
These are the idle fables of your bards."

However, he consents to go with Theseus to Athens, and will not add the guilt of suicide to that of homicide.

This play seems at no time to have been a favourite with either spectators or readers. For the former, this dose of Anaxagorean philosophy may have been too strong: for the latter, the piece may have seemed to follow "a course too bloody." Yet among the tragic spectacles on the Athenian stage, that of Hercules bound to a column, with the remains of his wife and children before him, and the terror-stricken looks of Amphitryon and his attendants, was surely one of the most affecting.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TALE OF TROY: HECUBA—THE TROJAN WOMEN.

"High barrows, without marble, or a name,
A vast untilled and mountain-skirted plain,
And Ida in the distance, still the same,
And old Scamander (if 'tis he) remain;
The situation seems still formed for fame—
A hundred thousand men might fight again
With ease; but where I sought for Ilion's walls,
The quiet sheep feeds, and the tortoise crawls."
—"Don Juan," Cant. iv.

On subjects connected with the Tale of Troy, ten dramas by Euripides, if the "Rhesus" be counted among them, are extant, and these represent a small portion only of the themes he drew from the perennial supply of the Homeric poems. The ancient epic, like the modern novel, although widely differing from tragedy in its form and substance, abounds in dramatic material. Many plays, indeed, by Euripides and other dramatic poets of the time, were derived from the Cyclic poets, who either continued the Iliad, and brought the story down to the fall of Troy, or took episodes in it as the groundwork of their dramas. Whether coming from

the main stream or from its branches, the result was the same; and the heroes who espoused the cause of Menelaus were most of them suited for transplantation to the theatre.

Two of the ten plays which have Troy for their subject, directly or indirectly, have been noticed in a previous chapter; another, the "Cyclops," will be examined presently. The "Rhesus," being of uncertain authorship, will be passed over. Of the seven that remain, only a brief sketch can be given. The Two Iphigenias, indeed, might alone suffice to show how well fitted for the genius of their poet was the Lay of Achilles or the Wanderings of Ulysses.

The fire that consumed Priam's capital is still smouldering when the action of the "Hecuba" and the "Trojan Women" begins. The scene of the former of these two tragedies is placed in the Thracian Chersonesus—now the Crimea. The Chorus is composed of Trojan captive women, a few days before the subjects, now the fellow-prisoners, of their queen. In the centre of the stage stands Agamemnon's tent, in a compartment of which Hecuba and her attendants are lodged. The prologue is spoken by her youngest son Polydorus, whom she supposes to be living, but who has been foully murdered by his guardian Polymnestor, the Thracian king. His ghost hovers over the tent, and after informing the audience of the manner of his death, he vanishes just as his aged mother enters on the stage. One more woe is soon imparted to Hecuba by the Chorus. The shade of Achilles has appeared in glittering armour on his tomb, and demanded a

victim. Again the Greek ships are delayed; again a virgin must be sacrificed before their anchors can be weighed. The young life of Iphigenia was required before the host could leave Aulis; and now the blood of Polyxena, Priam's youngest daughter, must be shed before the Grecian prows can be turned homewards.

The sacrifice of the daughter is over, when the fate of her son is reported to the miserable mother. An old attendant has been sent to fetch water from the sea, with which Hecuba will bathe—"not for the bridal bed, but for the tomb"—the dead body of Polyxena. The corpse of Polydorus is found by the attendant cast on the sea-beach by the wave. The sum of her woes is now complete. Her other sons have fallen in the war; no daughter remains to her except the prophetess Cassandra, who is herself the bondwoman of Agamemnon; and now her last stay is rudely torn from her—her youngest born, her Benjamin, lies dead on the sands. One hope alone remains for her to cherish—the hope of revenge on the murderer of her boy; and it is speedily gratified. The treacherous guardian comes to the Grecian camp, is inveigled by Hecuba into the tent, and thence thrust forth eyeless and with bleeding visage, by the infuriated mother and her attendants. This, "if not victory, is at least revenge."

The merits of this tragedy have been much canvassed. The plot has been pronounced monstrous, overcharged with woe, and, besides, unskilfully split into two unconnected portions. The immolation of Polyxena and the murder of Polydorus have, it is alleged, no neces-

sary connection with each other. There might have been two plays made out of this single one—the first concluding with the death of the daughter, the second with the vengeance taken for the son. It may be so; but was that the view of the story taken by Euripides? May he not have said to objectors, the continuity of my play lies not where you look for it, but in the character of the person from whom it is named? The double murder of her children is a mere incident in the action; the unity is to be found in her strong will. Old, feeble, and helpless as she is, the mind of the ex-queen of Troy is never clouded. Suffering even lends her new force to act; the deeper her woe the more clearly she perceives that all help is vain if it come not from her own dauntless spirit. It is the tragedy of Hecuba, not of Polyxena or Polydorus.

English readers may find an excuse, if one be needed, of which ancient objectors could not avail themselves. For is not the Hecuba of Euripides near of kin, as a dramatic character, to the Queen Margaret of Shakespeare? Her also accumulated woes strengthen even when they seem to crush. She also is made childless; she, like her Greek prototype, is a widow and discrowned. Yet with what vigour and what disdain does she to the last look down upon her Ulysses, the crafty Duke of Gloucester, and her Agamemnon, the voluptuous Edward! The description of Polyxena's sacrifice is among the most beautiful and pathetic pictures in the Athenian drama. The herald reports to Hecuba how bravely her daughter has met her doom:—

"The assembled host of Greece before the tomb
Stood in full ranks at this sad sacrifice—
Achilles' son, holding the virgin's hand
On the mound's summit: near to him I stood;
Of chosen youths an honourable train
Were ready there her strugglings to restrain."

When silence has been proclaimed through the host, and libations poured to the shade of Achilles, Pyrrhus spoke these words:—

"O son of Peleus, O my father,
Accept my offering, soothing to the dead;
Drink this pure crimson stream of virgin-blood,
Loose all our cables, fill our sails, and grant
Swift passage homeward to the Grecian host."

The people joined in the prayer: Pyrrhus drew from its scabbard his golden sword, and

"At his nod
The noble youths stept forth to hold the maiden,
Which she perceiving, with these words addressed them:
'Willing I die; let no hand touch me; boldly
To the uplifted sword I hold my neck.
You give me to the gods, then give me free.'
Loud the applause, then Agamemnon cried:
'Let no man touch her:' and the youths drew back.
Soon as she heard the royal words, she clasped
Her robe, and from her shoulder rent it down,
And bared her snow-white bosom, beauteous
Beyond the deftest sculptor's nicest art.
Then bending to the earth her knee, she said—
Ear never yet has heard more mournful words—
'If 'tis thy will, young man, to strike this breast,
Strike; or my throat dost thou prefer, behold
It stretched to meet thy sword.'"

Even the "rugged Pyrrhus" is touched with pity, muses, and at last reluctantly,

"Deep in her bosom plunged the shining steel.
Her life-blood gushed in streams: yet e'en in death,
Studious of modesty, her beauteous limbs
She covered with her robe."

THE TROJAN WOMEN.

The action of this play takes place a few days before that of the "Hecuba." It is not, properly speaking, a drama, for it has scarcely any fable. "It is," says Dean Milman, "a series of pathetic speeches and exquisite odes on the fall of Troy. What can be more admirable, in the midst of all these speeches of woe and sorrow, than the wild outburst of Cassandra into a bridal song, instead of, as Shakespeare describes her, 'shrilling her dolours forth'!"

"A light! a light! rise up, be swift:
I seize, I worship, and I lift
The bridal torches' festal rays,
Till all the burning fane's ablaze!
Hymen, Hymenœan king!
Look there! look there! what blessings wait
Upon the bridegroom's nuptial state!
And I, how blest, who proudly ride
Through Argos' streets, a queenly bride!
Go thou, my mother! go!
With many a gushing tear
And frantic shriek of woe.
Wail for thy sire, thy country dear!

I the while, in bridal glee
Lift the glowing, glittering fire.
Hymen! Hymen! all to thee
Flames the torch and rings the lyre.
Bless, O Hecatè, the rite;
Send thy soft and holy light
To the virgin's nuptial bed.
Lightly lift the airy tread!
Evan! Evan! dance along.
Holy are the dance and song;
Meetest they to celebrate
My father Priam's blissful fate.
Beauteous-vested maids of Troy,
Sing my song of nuptial joy!
Sing the fated husband led
To my virgin bridal bed." *

In another choral song, the rejoicing of Troy, at the very moment when the Greeks, coming out from their ambush in the wooden horse, were stealthily creeping to unbar the gates and admit the host from without, is described :—

"Shouted all the people loud
On the rock-built height that stood—
'Come,' they sang, as on they prest,
'Come, from all our toil released,
Lead the blest image to the shrine
Of her the Jove-born Trojan maid-divine.
. . . . . .
O'er the toil, the triumph, spread
Silent night her curtained shade,
But Lybian fifes still sweetly rang,
And many a Phrygian air they sang,

* Dean Milman—"Fragments from the Greek Tragedians," from which volume the following translations are taken.

And maidens danced with lightsome feet
To the jocund measures sweet,
And every home was blazing bright,
As the glowing festal light
Its rich and ruddy splendour streamed,
Where high and full the mantling wine-cup beamed.

. . . . . .

All at once the cry of slaughter,
Through the startled city ran ;
The cowering infants on their mother's breasts
Folded their trembling hands within her vests ;
Forth stalked the ambushed Mars, and his fell work began."

"Sad," said the aged Manoah in 'Samson Agonistes,'—

"Sad, but thou knowest to Israelites not saddest,
The desolation of a hostile city,'"

and probably Athenians, who had laid waste many cities, were not displeased by a representation of the destruction of Troy. With great skill, indeed, Euripides has shown that the victors are scarcely less deserving of pity than the vanquished. In every Grecian state during the ten years' siege—and what was true of the Trojan was true also of the Peloponnesian war—many had been made widows and orphans. While the Achæan kings and heroes were encamped on the Trojan strand, their wives have been false to them, usurpers have occupied their thrones, or suitors to their queens have been faring sumptuously at their cost. The prophecies of Cassandra point to further calamities. A bloody bath awaits Agamemnon ; some, like Idomeneus and Diomedes, must take refuge on alien shores ;

thwarting winds and stormy seas will keep for many years from their kingdoms Ulysses and Menelaus; the greater Ajax has been struck by mania, and falls by his own hand; and Ajax Teucer will soon be transfixed by a thunderbolt launched by the outraged Minerva. As in several Euripidean tragedies, women play an important part in this one. The daughters of Priam and their attendants are distributed among the black-bearded Achæan captains—Cassandra is allotted to the "king of men;" Andromache to Pyrrhus, the son of him who slew her husband; her son Astyanax, lest he prove a second Hector, and avenge his father's death on Argos or Sparta, is hurled from a tower; and Hecuba is assigned to Ulysses, whose wiles, quite as much as his compeers' weapons, have caused the taking of Troy. As in the "Suppliant Women," fire is employed to render the final scene effective. All of Troy that escaped on the night when it was stormed is now given over to the flames. The tragedy closes with the fall of column and roof, of temple and palace, into a fiery abyss, and by the red light of the conflagration the Trojan women are led off to the Grecian galleys.

Passing over the "Electra," that the Tale of Troy may not weary English readers, and also because what is good and what is bad in it* would require comment, for which there is not room, the "Orestes" comes next in order in this batch of Euripidean tragedies. "The scenes of this drama," says one who had good right to

* "Magnæ virtutes nec minora vitia" would be an appropriate motto for the "Electra" of Euripides.

speak on the subject of Greek Plays,* "afford one of the most beautiful exhibitions of the domestic affections which even the dramas of Euripides can furnish. To the English reader it may be necessary to say, that the situation at the opening of the drama is that of a brother attended only by his sister during the demoniacal possession of a suffering conscience (or, in the mythology of the play, haunted by Furies), and in circumstances of immediate danger from enemies, and of desertion or cold regard from nominal friends." As to the Furies, Longinus says that "the poet himself sees them, and what his imagination conceives, he almost compels his audience to see also." We do not know how the spectators welcomed this tragedy when it was performed; but in later times no one of all the Attic tragedies was so much approved as this one. It is more frequently cited than all the plays of Æschylus and Sophocles put together. The depth of its domestic pathos touched the Grecian world, however it may have affected a Dionysiac audience.

As in the "Libation Bearers" of Æschylus, Orestes has no sooner avenged the most foul and unnatural murder of his father than mania seizes him. When the first scene opens, he is lying haggard, blood-besprent, unshorn, unkempt, and in sordid garments, on a couch, beside which, for six days and six nights, his sister Electra has kept watch. During all that time he has not tasted food: in his lucid intervals he is feeble and fever-stricken; at others he sees in pursuit of him his mother's vengeful Furies. Menelaus, his uncle,

* De Quincey.

has recently returned from Troy, accompanied by his wife, Helen, and their daughter, Hermione. Here for the wretched maniac appears to be a gleam of hope for surely one so near of kin cannot fail to aid him against the citizens of Argos who are calling for his death, or at least perpetual banishment as a matricide taken red-handed. Helen and Electra, after some difference on the subject, agree that Hermione shall go with offerings to Clytemnestra's grave. The Chorus, composed of Argive women, sing round the sick man's bed. Their theme is the alternate ravings and rational moods of Orestes, nor do they omit to celebrate the awful power of the Furies. And now Menelaus enters, but it soon appears that his nephew will have little help from him. He discovers that Orestes and Electra are to be tried on the capital charge of murder on that very day, by the assembled Argive people. The unhappy culprit pleads strongly for his sister and himself, and their just claim for the aid and protection of the Spartan king. A new enemy now appears. Old Tyndareus, the father of Helen and Clytemnestra, arrives, and by his arguments against Orestes, decides his wavering son-in-law to remain neuter in the controversy. By craft and shifts alone will Menelaus take the part of the brother and sister. On his part the enraged Tyndareus will do all he can to procure their condemnation. Pylades, their only friend, urges Orestes to present himself to the assembly, plead his own cause, and if possible, by his eloquence, work on the feelings of his judges. He attends, but fails in obtaining a milder sentence than death—the only concession is, that Elec-

ya and her brother may put themselves to death, and so avoid the indignity, prince and princess as they are, of dying by the hands of a public executioner or an infuriated mob. The condemned pair take a final farewell, when Pylades suggests a mode of revenge on Menelaus. "Helen," he says, "is now within the palace: slay her, and revenge yourselves on your cold-hearted and selfish kinsman. Fear not her guards; they are only a few cowardly and feeble eunuchs." To this proposal Electra adds a most practical amendment. "Killing Helen will avail little: seize Hermione—she is now returning from Clytemnestra's tomb—and hold her as a hostage. Sooner than have his daughter and only child perish, Menelaus will befriend you." They combine both plans: Helen shall be slain; Hermione shall be seized upon. The former escapes their hands: just as the sword is at her throat she vanishes into thin air, and, being of divine origin, henceforth will share the immortality of her brothers, Castor and Pollux. The palace doors are barred against Menelaus, now returned from the assembly; but he beholds Orestes and Pylades, with Hermione between them, on the roof. Her they will slay, and make the palace itself her and their funeral pyre. This is indeed a dead lock. But Apollo appears with Helen floating in the air. By his mandate the crime of blood is cancelled: all shall live; and the remaining years of Orestes, Electra, and Pylades, pass unclouded by woe.

In the "Andromache" Orestes appears once more, but not as a leading character. He might, indeed, were

it not for his relatives Menelaus and Hermione, have been another person so named, since of the hero of so many Greek dramas there is scarcely a trace left, except a disposition to do murder. Most people, after shedding so much human blood as he has done, would be contented with living thenceforward at peace with all men—even his rivals in love. But, on the contrary, this Argive prince contrives in the "Andromache" to put out of his way Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, for no better reason than that of coveting Hermione, the Phthian king's wife, and his own first cousin. We know not whether Apollo grew weary of cleansing of crime; yet to plot and execute a capital offence in the god's own temple at Delphi can hardly have been other than a severe trial of even divine patience.

As this play appears to have obtained the second prize at the time of its representation, besides furnishing the modern stage with more than one tragedy on the subject, it must be credited with a fair amount of interest for spectators. Yet it may be doubted whether it be equally attractive to readers. All that is material to be known of the plot may be gathered from its representatives—the "Andromaque" of Racine, and the "Distrest Mother" of Ambrose Philips. The following scene, the most effective as well as touching in this somewhat complicated drama, may afford a sample—and it is a favourable one—of the original.

The heroine from whom the play takes its title is in the power of her enemies, Hermione, wife of Neoptolemus, and her father Menelaus. Bound with cords,

she is being led off to execution, when the aged Peleus, the father of Achilles, and great-grandsire of Andromache's son, the little Molossus, enters and releases her. In the part of Molossus, as in that of the infant Orestes in the "Iphigenia at Aulis," we have a specimen of the manner in which Euripides availed himself of children in his scenes. Peleus says to the guards who are in charge of their prisoner :—

"Stand from her, slaves, that I may know who dares
Oppose me, while I free her hands from chains.
. . . . Come hither, child ;
Beneath my arms unbind thy mother's chains ;
In Phthia will I nurture thee.
. . . . . .
Go forward, child, beneath my sheltering arms,
And thou, unhappy dame : the raging storm
Escaped, in harbour thou art now secure."

The "Helen" can scarcely be said to form part of the dramatic Tale of Troy, even although Menelaus and his wife are among its *dramatis personæ*. It is a kind of offshoot from that world-wide legend. Perhaps Euripides, like the lyric poet Stesichorus, thought that some apology was due from him to "the fairest and most loving wife in Greece." In his "Hecuba" and "Trojan Women" Helen comes in for her full share of hard words. In the "Orestes" she is represented as greedy of gain, and making an inventory of the goods and chattels of Electra and her brother even before they were condemned to death. In the play last surveyed, Menelaus is rated for taking her again to his bosom, instead of cutting her throat. The lovely

and liberal matron of the Odyssey, the mistress of all hearts of the Iliad, had hitherto been scurvily treated by our poet. His apology to her memory in the play bearing her name is curious. The purport of it is to show that there had been a fearful mistake made all along by the Greeks. The good-for-nothing Helen, for whom they shed so much blood, was a phantasm, a double, a prank of mischievous deities. The real Helen never went near Ilion,—never injured any one, not even her husband,—but passed the score of years between the visit of Paris to Sparta and the fall of that city in a respectable grass-widowhood under the roof of a pious king and a holy prophetess in Egypt. Here was a delightful discovery! A great capital had been sacked and burnt to the ground; a whole nation removed from its place; Greece nearly ruined; thousands of valiant knights hurried to Hades; hundreds of dainty and delicate women told off, like so many sheep, to new owners; the very gods themselves set together by the ears;—and all for nothing—for a shadow that dislimned into thin air the instant it was no longer wanted for troubling and bewildering mankind!

It has been doubted whether there be a comic element in the "Alcestis;" it is far easier to detect one in the "Helen." Menelaus has lost his ship, and gets to land by clinging to its keel. He knows not on what coast he has been wrecked; but wherever it may be, he is not fit to present himself to any respectable person. He says,—

"I have nor food nor raiment, proof of this
Are these poor coverings; all my former robes
The sea has swallowed."

He is scolded by an old woman, the portress of King Theoclymenus's palace, who, seeing his tattered garments, takes him for a rogue and vagabond, and when told by him that he is a Greek, says, "The worse welcome; I am charged by my master to let none of that race approach his door." The trick by which Helen and himself try to make their escape from the island of Pharos nearly resembles the one we have already met with in the "Iphigenia at Tauri," —better executed, indeed, and more favoured by wind and wave, for in this play the flight is effected. The Chorus, however, who have been aiding the fugitives in the plot by secrecy, like the Chorus in the "Iphigenia," incur the wrath of the king; and as for his sister, the pious and prophetic Theonoè, she has been the chief abettor, and shall pay for her deceit with her life. Theoclymenus, indeed, is even more wroth than the Iphigenian Thoas on a similar occasion, and perhaps justly; for whereas the Tauric king was only incensed because the image of his goddess was stolen, Theoclymenus is a lover of Helen, whom for years he had been eager to make his wife. This makes a material difference between the two cases. It might have been possible to obtain a new image of Diana, and induce the goddess to consecrate it properly; but in all the world there was only one Helen.

The character of the priestess Theonoè bears some

resemblance to that of Ion. Like him, she is truly pure-minded and devout: like him, also, her ministration at the altar is a labour of love. Deeply religious, she is also tender and sympathising with another's woe; and so soon as she is convinced that the beautiful Greek who has so long taken sanctuary at the tomb of Proteus is the lawful wife of the shipwrecked stranger, she favours their escape. She says,—

"To piety my nature and my will
Incline: myself I reverence, nor will stain
My father's glory; neither will I grant
That to my brother which will mark my name
With infamy: for Justice in my heart
Has raised her ample shrine; for Nereus
This I hold, and Menelaus will strive to save."

It has already been observed that the "Ion" displays the sympathy of the poet with virtue and piety in man: the character of Theonoè shows that the supposed misogynist was equally impressed with, as well as able to delineate, purity and piety in woman.

CHAPTER X.

THE CYCLOPS.

"This is as strange a thing as e'er I looked on.
He is as disproportioned in his manners
As in his shape."
—"Tempest."

We can hardly be grateful enough for the care or caprice of the grammarian or the collector of old plays who has preserved for us one sample of the Greek satyric drama. Some uncertainty still exists about the precise nature of this curious appendage to the tragic Trilogy; but without such aid as we get from the "Cyclops" of Euripides, we should depend on fragments or guess-work, if not be quite in the dark. Even with this single plank from the general wreck of these after-pieces before us, we look at the species through a veil. The severe and solemn Æschylus is recorded to have been a successful composer of such light and cheerful pieces; but this bit of information by no means helps to clear up doubts. Sweetness may have come out of the strong, but of what kind was Æschylean mirth, or even relaxation from gravity?

The decorous Sophocles is reported to have enacted the part of Nausicaa, and played at ball with the hand-maidens of the princess in a satyric story evidently taken from one of the most beautiful scenes in the Odyssey. But how the serene and majestic artist managed to comport himself under such circumstances we have still to wonder. All we know for certain about the Greek fourth play is, that it was intended to soothe and calm down the feelings of the spectators after they had been strained and agitated by the prophetic swan-song of Cassandra, by the wail of Jason for his murdered children, by the scene in which Orestes flies from the Furies, or that wherein the noble Antigone and the loving Hæmon are clasped together in their death-embrace.

Such relaxation of excited feeling was in the true spirit of Greek art in its best days, which required even in the hurricane of tragic passion a moderating element, and the means of returning to composure. Let not, however, the English reader imagine that, although the satyric drama was designed to send home the audience in a tranquil and even cheerful mood, it bore any resemblance to farce, much less to burlesque. Welcome as parodies of scenes or verses from "the lofty grave tragedians" were to Athenian ears, skilful as the comic writers were in such travesties, a Greek audience in the time of Euripides would have hurled sticks, stones, and hard-shelled fruit at the buffoons who committed such profanation. "Hamlet," if performed at Athens, would not have been followed by "a popular farce"! Perhaps there is no better definition of the satyric

drama than this—and it is one of ancient date—it was "a sportive tragedy." It was not written by comic, but always by tragic poets: it was in some measure a performance of "state and ancientry." Seldom, if ever, was it acted apart from tragedy. It may have been a shadow or reminiscence of the primeval age of stage-plays, when the actors were all strollers and the theatre was a cart. Prone to change in their favour or affection to their rulers—ostracising or crowning them as the whim of the moment suggested—the Athenians were very conservative in their opinions on art, and so may have chosen to retain a sample of the rude entertainments of Thespis, even in the "most high and palmy state" of the tragic drama. The satyric *dramatis personæ* were grave and dignified personages,—demigods and heroes, kings and prophets, councillors and warriors,—who spoke a dialogue, as Ulysses does in the "Cyclops," only a little less grave than that of the preceding tragedies, perchance a little more ironical than the buskin would have allowed. To make wild laughter was the function of the comedian; to excite cheerfulness rather than mirth was probably the function of these appendages.

In a city where the Homeric poems were sung or said in the streets, the story of Ulysses and the Cyclops was as familiar to the ears of gentle and simple as "household words." The plot of it and some of the humour are Homer's. But the one-eyed giant of the Odyssey is a solitary bachelor, and the Chorus of Satyrs, indispensable for the piece, was a later invention. In Homeric days, Sicily and southern Italy

were the wonder-land of the eastern Greeks. Like Prospero's island, they were thought to harbour very strange beasts. In Sicily dwelt a band of gigantic brethren, who lived, while they had nothing better to eat, on the milk, cheese, and mutton supplied by their flocks, but who were always glad to mend their fare by devouring strangers unlucky enough to come into their neighbourhood. This ill luck befell Ulysses and his ship's crew—sole survivors of the Ithacan flotilla—on their return from Troy. Contrary winds had driven them far from their course: want of water compelled them to land on the Sicilian shore. In quest of spring or brook, they go to the cavern of the Cyclops. He, fortunately for them, is not just then at home; but his servants, Silenus and the Satyrs, are within, and after a short parley with their unexpected visitors, they consent to supply their need, and even to sell the Greek captain some of their master's goods, tempted by the quite irresistible bribe of a flask of excellent wine. It may be as well to say at once what had brought such strange domestics into the Cyclops' country, and thus the reader will see why they were so glad to taste wine again, and why they acted dishonestly in selling the lambs and kids. The Satyrs had lost their lord and master Bacchus, who had been carried off by Tyrrhenian pirates. So they left their homes in Arcadian highland or Thessalian woods, and went to sea in quest of him, lovers of the wine-cask as they were. Probably these hairy and unkempt folks were imperfectly versed in navigation, or they may have had a drunken steersman, or the winds may have been as perverse as they were to

Ulysses. In one respect, either their hideousness or their years—Silenus, at least, was advanced in life—may have befriended them, for Polyphemus does not eat them raw or broiled on the embers, but keeps them in his cave for the service of his dairy and his kine. At last Polyphemus enters; and now we can imagine some excitement on the part of the junior Athenians, sedate smiles on that of their elders, and even a scream or two from the place where the women were packed together. No known art or device, we may be sure, was neglected by the managers in making up the giant for his part. If Ulysses were of the usual stature of Greek performers, Polyphemus must have worn far higher soles and loftier head-gear than the Ithacan king. The monster must have been at least by "the altitude of a chopine" taller than his guest. A yawning mask doubtless aggravated the terror of his visage; his voice must have been like that of an irate bull; and his single eye as big as an ordinary-sized plate, and red as a live coal. The Satyrs may have reminded their beholders of the well-known features of Socrates; nor could the philosopher have been justly angry at a resemblance that he himself had pointed out. Polyphemus is too stupid to be either "witty in himself or a cause of wit in others;" accordingly, such comic business as there is in the piece devolves on Silenus and his companions, who relieve gigantic dulness by quips and cranks, much as the celebrated Jack relieves the stolidity of Blunderbore by some friendly conversation before he rips him up.

The Cyclops had been absent on Ætna, hunting with

his dogs. Like King Lear on his return from the chase, he calls out lustily for his dinner, after a previous inquiry about his lambs, ewes, and cheese-baskets. He discerns that something unusual has taken place during his absence, and threatens to beat Silenus until he rains tears, unless he anwers promptly. Next his eye lights on the strangers, and also on something still more irritating to him as a grazier :—

"What is this crowd I see beside the stalls?
Outlaws or thieves? for near my cavern-home
I see my young lambs coupled two by two
With willow-bands : mixed with my cheeses lie
Their implements ; and this old fellow here
Has his bald head broken with stripes." *

The shrewd but perfidious Silenus has inflicted these stripes on himself in order to make his story of being robbed credible to his master—a device of a similar kind to that which Bardolph says caused him to blush.

"*Sil.* Ah me!
I have been beaten till I burn with fever.
Cyc. By whom? who laid his fist upon your head?
Sil. Those men, because I would not suffer them
To steal your goods.
Cyc. Did not the rascals know
I am a god, sprung from the race of heaven?
Sil. I told them so, but they bore off your things,
And ate the cheese in spite of all I said,
And carried out the lambs."

And inasmuch as this capital felony was, he alleged,

* Shelley's translation of the "Cyclops" has been followed in each extract from the piece.

accompanied by threats of personal violence to Polyphemus himself, he not unreasonably flies into a terrible passion, and hastens to enforce Cyclopian law on the spoilers of his goods :—

"*Cycl.* In truth? nay, haste, and place in order quickly
The cooking-knives, and heap upon the hearth,
And kindle it, a great fagot of wood;
As soon as they are slaughtered they shall fill
My belly, broiling warm from the live coals,
Or boiled and seethed within the bubbling caldron.
I am quite sick of the wild mountain-game,
Of stags and lions I have gorged enough,
And I grow hungry for the flesh of men."

In vain Ulysses assures Polyphemus that he has never laid hands on Silenus; that he purchased the lambs for wine, honestly as he thought, and that the lying old Satyr's nose will vouch for the exchange and barter. All was done

"By mutual compact, without force;
There is no word of truth in all he says,
For slily he was selling all your store."

But as well might a poacher accused of snaring hares or trapping foxes have pleaded innocence before that worshipful justice Squire Western, as Ulysses expect his plain tale to put down the evidence, confirmed by the very hard swearing, of Silenus. The Chorus, indeed, following its proper function of mediator between "contending opposites," assures the Cyclops that the stranger tells the simple truth, and that they saw Silenus giving the lambs to him.

"You lie!" exclaims the giant; "this old fellow is juster than Rhadamanthus: I believe his story." Now, for a few minutes, curiosity prevails over hunger for the flesh of men, and Polyphemus inquires about the race, adventures, life, and conversation of the intruders on his cavern. Ulysses, carefully concealing his real name, gives the required information. He is one of the chiefs who have taken Troy: he is on his return home to Ithaca: not choice, but tempests, have brought him to this land. "Moreover," he adds, "if you kill and eat me or my comrades, you will be very ungrateful. We are all pious worshippers of your 'great father' Neptune. We have built him many temples in Greece. Much have we endured by way and land and sea, and it will be very hard on us, after escaping so many perils, to be now roasted or boiled for a supper to Neptune's son."

The reply of Polyphemus is just what might have been looked for from such a sensual barbarian. It is unfilial, and even blasphemous. "A fig," he cries, "for your temples and their gods. The wise man knows of nothing worth worshipping except wealth."

> "All other things are a pretence and boast.
> What are my father's ocean promontories,
> The sacred rocks whereon he dwells, to me?
> Strangers, I laugh to scorn Jove's thunderbolt:
> I know not that his strength is more than mine;
> As to the rest I care not."

"Jupiter may send snow or rain or wind as he list. I have a weather-proof cave, plenty of fuel and milk;

my larder is ever provided with a haunch of lion or a fat calf; and so that I have a good crop of grass in yonder meadows, I and my cattle care alike for your Jupiter." And then he winds up with a declaration of his purpose to have a good dinner:—

> "I well know
> The wise man's only Jupiter is this,
> To eat and drink during his little day,
> And give himself no care. And as for those
> Who complicate with laws the life of man,
> I freely give them tears for their reward.
> I will not cheat my soul of its delight,
> Or hesitate in dining upon you."

Clearly, after hearing these hospitable intentions, Ulysses will need all the cunning for which he was famed. "This," he thinks, "is by far the worst scrape I ever was in. Very near was I to death when I entered Troy town as a spy, and when I cajoled Queen Hecuba to let me out of it. I just missed being transfixed by Philoctetes in Lemnos by one of his poisoned arrows, when Machaon, that skilful surgeon, was many leagues away from me, and when, even if he had been at hand, he could not perhaps have counteracted the old centaur's venom. 'About my brain,' I must not faint, but contrive to foil this brute's designs. If I cannot, better had it been for me to have died by the hand of the mad Ajax, for then I should have been decently buried by the Greeks, and Penelope have known what became of me; whereas, if I am to go down this monster's 'insatiate maw,' she may go

on for ten years more weeping and weaving, and after all be forced to marry one of her suitors. Now, if ever, Pallas Athenè befriend me."

The stage is cleared, and the Chorus sing appropriate but not cheerful stanzas, with reference to present circumstances:—

"The Cyclops Ætnean is cruel and bold,
He murders the strangers
That sit on his hearth,
And dreads no avengers
To rise from the earth.
He roasts the men before they are cold,
He snatches them broiling from the coal,
And from the caldron pulls them whole,
And minces their flesh and gnaws their bone
With his cursed teeth till all be gone."

Ulysses re-enters; he has been surveying the Cyclopian larder and kitchen, and is as terrified by the sight of their contents as Fatima was when she rushed out of Bluebeard's chamber of horrors. He has seen Polyphemus providing for his own comforts. He kindles a huge fire,—

"Casting on the broad hearth
The knotty limbs of an enormous oak,
Three waggon-loads at least."

He spreads upon the ground a couch of pine-leaves: he milks his cows,—

"And fills a bowl
Three cubits wide and four in depth, as much
As would contain three amphoræ, and bound it
With ivy."

He puts on the fire a pot to boil, and makes red-hot the points of sundry spits, and, when all is ready, he seizes two of the Ithacans,—

> "And killed them in a measured kind of manner;
> For he flung one against the brazen rivets
> Of the huge caldron, and caught the other
> By the foot's tendon, and knocked out his brains
> Upon the sharp edge of the craggy stone."

One he boiled, the other he roasted, while Ulysses,

> "With the tears raining from his eyes,
> Stood near the Cyclops, ministering to him."

But while waiting at table, a happy thought presents itself to Ulysses. "If I can but make him drunk then I can deal with him." He plies him well Maronian wine at dinner; but Polyphemus is as a that fou" to fall into the trap. He is still enough to remember that his brother-giants may a cheerful glass no less than himself. They inbit a village on Ætna not far off, and he will go and vite them to share his Bacchic drink. The Chorus dvise Ulysses to walk with him, and pitch him over precipice, as he is somewhat unsteady on his legs. "That will never do," responds the sagacious Ithacan. "I have a far more subtle device. I will appeal to his appetite: tell him how unwise it were to summon partners for his revelry. Why not prolong his pleasure by keeping this particular Maronian for his own sole use?" The Cyclops presently returns, singing—

> "Ha! ha! I am full of wine,
> Heavy with the joy divine,

With the young feast oversated ;
Like a merchant's vessel freighted
To the water's edge, my crop
Is laden to the gullet's top.
The fresh meadow-grass of spring
Tempts me forth thus wandering
To my brothers on the mountains,
Who shall share the wine's sweet fountains.
Bring the cask, O stranger, bring ! "

He is diverted from his purpose by Ulysses ; and for once Silenus acts a friendly part to him by asking his master, " What need have you of pot-companions ? stay at home." Indeed the advice proceeds from a design to filch some of the wine himself—an impossibility if the cask is borne off to the village, where there will be so many eyes—single ones indeed—upon it. So it is agreed that the giant-brothers be kept in the dark, and quaff their bowls of milk, while Polyphemus drinks deep potations of Maron alone. The Greek stranger has now so ingratiated himself with his savage host, that the latter condescends to ask his name, and to promise to eat him last, in token of his gratitude for his drink and good counsel. " My name," says Ulysses, " is Nobody." With this information the Sicilian Caliban is content ; and with the exception that Silenus teases him by putting the flagon out of his reach, with the above-mentioned *felonious* intent, all goes merry as a marriage-bell. Ulysses, now again cup-bearer, plies him so well, that the " poor monster " sees visions—

" The throne of Jove,
And the clear congregation of the Gods "—

and in the end drops off into slumber profound as Christopher Sly's.

Now comes the dramatic retribution. The trunk of an olive-tree has been sharpened to a point, is heated in the fire, and thrust by Ulysses and his surviving companions into the eye of the insensible giant. The Chorus, indeed, had promised to lend a hand in this operation, for they are anxious to be off in quest of their liege-lord Bacchus. But their courage fails them at the proper moment—some have sprained ankles, others have dust in their eyes, others weakness of spine. All they can or will do—and this service is truly operatic in its kind—is to sing a cheerful and encouraging accompaniment to the boring-out of the eye:—

> "Hasten and thrust,
> And parch up to dust,
> The eye of the beast
> Who feeds on his guest;
> Burn and blind
> The Ætnean hind;
> Scoop and draw,
> But beware lest he claw
> Your limbs near his maw."

The last scene of the "Cyclops" has to the reader an appearance of being either imperfectly preserved or originally hurried over. It may be that, not having the action before us, we miss some connecting dumb-show. In the Odyssey the escape of Ulysses and his crew is effected with much difficulty, and great risk to their chief: in this satyric play they get out of the

cave quickly as well as safely, though its owner says that—

"Standing at the outlet,
He'll bar the way and catch them as they pass:"

but either they creep under his huge legs, like so many Gullivers in Brobdingnag, or he is a very inefficient doorkeeper—drink and pain seemingly having rendered him as incapable of hearing as of sight. Indeed Polyphemus, blind and despairing, is the only sufferer in this flight of the Ithacans. In striking at them he beats the air, or cracks his skull against the rocky wall. The Chorus taunt and misguide him. "Are these villains on my right hand?" "No, on your left,"—whereupon he dashes at vacancy, and cries, "O woe on woe, I have broken my head!" "Did you fall into the fire when drunk?" ask the mocking Chorus, who had been witnesses of the whole transaction. "'Twas Nobody destroyed me." "Then no one is to blame." "I tell you, varlets as you are, Nobody blinded me." "Then you are not blind." "Where is that accursed Nobody?" "Nowhere, Cyclops." But at last the secret comes out. "Detested wretch, where are you?" roars the baffled monster. The wretch replies:—

"Far from you,
I keep with care this body of Ulysses.
Cycl. What do you say? You proffer a new name!
Ulys. My father named me so: and I have taken
A full revenge for your unnatural feast:
I should have done ill to burn down Troy,
And not revenged the murder of my comrades.

Cycl. Ai, Ai! the ancient oracle is accomplished;
It said that I should have my eyesight blinded
By you coming from Troy, yet it foretold
That you should pay the penalty for this,
By wandering long over the homeless sea."

The humour of this after-piece may not seem to English readers of the first quality, and the quibble on *Nobody* and *Nowhere* to be far beneath the level of the *jeu de mots* in modern burlesque. But let them not therefore look down on Ancient Classics. Rome was not built in a day. Life is short, but the art of Punning is long. Even Aristophanes came not up to the mark of Thomas Hood. The world, it must be remembered, was comparatively young when Euripides wrote his "Cyclops"—much younger when Homer told the tale of Polyphemus and Ulysses. Moreover, a bucolical monster was not a person to throw away the cream of jests upon. Probably he never quite comprehended the point of *Nobody*, though in after-hours, and in the tedium of blindness, disabled from hunting the lion and the bear of Mount Ætna, he must have often pondered on his unlucky encounter with a crafty Greek. Also it should be borne in mind that the real fun and frolic of the Athenians was reserved for the comic drama. There, indeed, it was as extravagant, satyrical, and even boisterous as we can imagine, or spectators could desire. Possibly Euripides, grave, taciturn, and tender in his disposition, was not the best representative of this species of drama. That there was in him some latent humour, some disposition to slide out of the tragic into the comic vein, has already been

observed in the sketch of his "Alcestis." With all its shortcomings, the "Cyclops" is the sole contemporary clue we have to the nature of the fourth member of the usual batch of plays, and so, with Sancho, we must "be thankful for it, and not look the gift horse too closely in the mouth."

END OF EURIPIDES.

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